

OSWALD CRAY
COLLECTION
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OSWALD CRAY BY MRS. HENRY WOOD.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

COLLECTED

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OSWALD CRAY

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," "TREVLYN HOLD," ETC.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

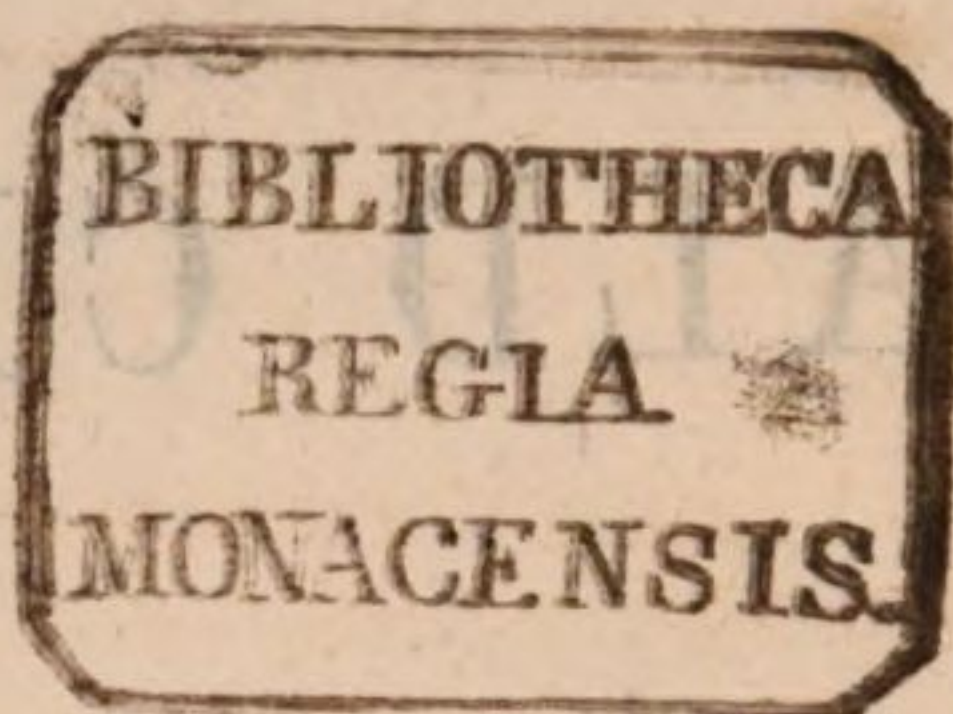
VOL. II.

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BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1865.

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O SWALD C RAY.

CHAPTER I.

Sorrow.

To describe the sorrow, the consternation that fell on all Hallingham in the loss of Dr. Davenal, would be a fruitless task. People could not believe that he was really dead. It had been asserted that the danger was past, and he was getting better rapidly. They looked at each other in a bewildered sort of way, and asked what he had died of? Of a neglected cold, was the answer of those who knew best, or supposed they knew—the medical body of Hallingham. And indeed there was little doubt that they were correct: the immediate malady which had deprived the town of that valuable life, was a very simple thing — a cold, neglected at the onset.

Sara Davenal was stunned: stunned with the weight of the calamity, with the grief it brought. And yet it probably fell upon her with less startling intensity than it would have done had she been in the full suntide of prosperity. She had been recently living in nothing but sorrow. The grief and terror brought to her by that night's unhappy secret (which you now know was connected with her brother), had been succeeded by the withdrawal of the friendship — to call it by a light name — of Oswald Cray. She had believed that the world could bring no other calamity that could add to her

misery: she had not thought of that most grievous one — a father's death.

In all pain there must be a reaction: the very violence of the first grief induces it; and it came sooner to Sara Davenal than it does to most sufferers. Or, it may be, that the grave, the *real* nature of the grief brought its own effects. Had it been simple mourning alone, the natural sorrow for the loss of a good and loving father, she might have gone on weeping for months: but there was behind it that heritage of terror on her brother's account, there was the consciousness that with her the heavy secret was left, and the completion of its purchase. The blinding tears ceased, the lively grief settled down into one long, inward, dull agony; and ere many days went over, she had become, in manner, almost unnaturally cold and calm. "How well his daughter bears it," the town said, when it had an opportunity of seeing her. In her subdued manner, her still face, her low, measured tones which never trembled, they read only serene resignation. Ah! how few of us think to remember in every-day life that it is the silent grief that does its work within.

She was obliged so soon to set about her responsibilities. Dr. Davenal's request to her had been to post a certain letter that she would find in his desk within four-and-twenty hours of his decease: to post it herself. On the afternoon of the day following the death, she carried the desk to her own room and examined it. There was the letter to Edward, there was the letter to Oswald Cray; both were lying where she had placed them; and there was the packet addressed to herself. The letter it enclosed was directed "Mr. Alfred King, care of Messrs. Jones and Green, Essex Street, Strand, London." The directions to herself were very clear. As soon as the money was realised she was to write and appoint an interview with Mr. Alfred King, and pay over to him the

two thousand five hundred pounds upon his delivering up to her certain papers, copies of which were enclosed. This interview might take place at Hallingham if Mr. Alfred King would journey to it: if he declined, she would be under the necessity of going to London and meeting him at Messrs. Jones and Green's. But on no account was she to pay the money by deputy or by letter, because it was essential that she should examine the papers that would be delivered to her, and see that they tallied with the copies written down. Mr. Alfred King would then have to sign a receipt, which the doctor had written and sealed up, and which, he added, she had better not unseal until the moment came for signing it. The receipt and one or two of the papers she was afterwards to re-seal and keep until the return of Edward Davenal. If Edward died abroad, then they were to be burnt.

Sara re-locked the desk; and still she could not form any very definite idea of what Edward's crime had been. The letter to Mr. Alfred King and the letter to Oswald Cray she kept out, for they must be posted ere the day should close. She went out herself at dusk and posted them; whatever duty lay before her, she felt that she must go about it, shrinking from none. Girl though she was in years, she was beginning to feel old in sorrow: no teacher is like unto it. There are woes that bring more experience to the heart in the first night of their falling, than will half a lifetime of smooth years.

It was through the letter sent to him that Oswald Cray first learnt the death of Dr. Davenal. He was seated at his breakfast-table in Parliament Street, eyes and thoughts buried in the "Times," when Benn came in with the letters, a whole stack of them, and laid them down by his side. There Oswald let them lie: and it was only in gathering them up later to take down and open in his business-room, that his eye fell on one in particular, rather a large envelope, with a black

border and a black seal. He knew the writing well, and a flush of emotion rose to his face as he opened it. Two notes were enclosed.

"MY DEAR MR. OSWALD CRAY,

"I do not know whether I shall be the first to tell you of the death of my dear father. He died last night, about ten o'clock. An hour or two previously, he penned the enclosed note to you; and he bade me add a few lines when I forwarded it, to explain that when he attempted it, he was almost past writing. But that he made this an especial request, I would not have troubled you with anything from myself: indeed I am scarcely capable of writing coherently to-day, for my grief is very great.

"Believe me very sincerely yours,

"SARA DAVENAL."

The first rapid gathering-in of the general sense over, he leaned his elbow on the table and read the words deliberately. It was just the note that her good sense would prompt her to write, under the altered relations between them. He felt that it was — but he had not witnessed her hesitation and the doubt whether she should not rather address him formally than as a friend. If those dandy clerks in the rooms below, if those grave gentlemen with whom he would be brought in contact during the day, had but seen him press those two words, "Sara Davenal," to his lips! He, the reserved, self-possessed man of business, he of the cold, proud spirit! he kissed the name as fervently as any schoolboy kisses that in his first love-letter.

And then he recollected himself; and as his wits, which had certainly gone wool-gathering, came back to him, another flush dyed his face far deeper than the last had dyed it;

a flush of shame that he should have been betrayed into the folly. Besides, that was not the way to help him to forget her, as it was imperative on him that he should forget.

He took up the note of the doctor. And he could scarcely believe that that weak, scrawling writing was traced by the once bold, clear hand of Dr. Davenal. It ran as follows:—

“MY DEAR FRIEND, — I call you so in spite of the coolness that has come between us. I would that all should be friends with me in my dying hour.

“The expected money, as you probably know, is at last to come to Caroline. I shall not be spared to urge its settlement upon herself, but do you urge it. As soon as it shall be paid over, let Mark secure it to Caroline absolutely, so that she and her children may have something to fall back upon in case of need. They are both young, both thoughtless, and, if left to themselves in the matter, will be almost sure to waste the money, so that it would do no real good to either. If Mark — I cannot write more: sight is failing.

“Fare you well, My Friend,

“R. D.”

And he was dead! For a few moments, Oswald forgot all his doubts and fears of the man, and leaped back in memory to the time when he had respected him more than anybody in the world. *Had* he died with that weight of guilt upon him? *How* weighty was it? how far did it extend? It seemed strange that he should so soon have followed Lady Oswald. Had remorse hastened his death? But, in spite of these thoughts, which Oswald called not up willingly, he did feel a deep sense of regret, of sorrow for Dr. Davenal, and wished that his life might have been spared to him.

It was incumbent on him to answer the other note, and he sat down to his writing-table and drew a sheet of paper towards him, and began:

“MY DEAR ——”

There he stopped. How should he address her? My dear Miss Davenal? — or My dear Sara? The one seemed too formal, considering how long he had called her Sara, considering that the present moment of deep sorrow should make all her friends especially tender to her. But yet — My dear Sara — better perhaps that he should not. So he finally began:

“MY DEAR MISS DAVENAL,

“I do indeed heartily sympathise with you in your great affliction. I wish for your sake and his that the doctor’s life had been spared. You do not give me any particulars — and I could not at such a moment expect them — but I fear his death must have been sudden. Will you allow me to exercise the privilege of a friend, in begging you to endeavour to bear up as bravely as it is possible for you to do, in these the first keen moments of grief. When next at Hallingham, I will with your permission call on you and Miss Davenal, and express to you in person my heartfelt sympathy. Meanwhile believe me now and always your truly sincere friend,

“O. OSWALD CRAY.

“Miss Sara Davenal.”

“Of course Mark must settle it upon her!” he said to himself as he glanced again at the contents of the doctor’s note to him. “It is not to be supposed he would do otherwise. However, I’ll mention it when I go next to Hallingham.”

And, gathering the papers together, he locked them in his

private desk, and went down to enter on his day's work, carrying the rest of the letters in his hand.

On the day subsequent to the interment of Dr. Davenal, Sara told her aunt she should go and see the two little boys. It had been her wish that they should be sent for to attend the funeral, but Miss Davenal objected: they were over young, she considered. Sara was too really miserable to care about it: of what little moment do trifles seem when the mind is ill at ease.

Miss Davenal again objected to her visit. In fact, had lookers-on been gifted with prevision, they might have seen that the opinions and course of herself and niece would be henceforth somewhat antagonistic to each other. She objected to Sara's proposed visit, recommending her to defer it for a week or two.

"But, aunt, I want to see them," urged Sara. "I know how grieved they have been: though Dick is random and light-headed, he has a most tender heart. And papa gave me a dying message to deliver to them."

"I say that it is too soon to go," repeated Miss Davenal. "A pretty thing for you to be seen gadding about out of doors the very day after your poor papa is taken from the house."

"Oh, aunt! Gadding! I ——" for a moment she struggled with her tears; the thought of the terrible weight of sorrow she must carry out with her wherever she went, presented such a contrast to the word. At home or out, she was ever living in her breaking heart: and it appeared of little consequence what the world might say. She believed it was her duty to see the boys as soon as possible, and she had fully resolved that her duty, in all ways, should be performed to the uttermost, Heaven helping her.

"I must go, aunt," she said. "I think I am doing right."

She walked in her deep mourning, with her crape veil over her face, to the station. One of the porters got her ticket for her and saw her into the carriage. Whether by the good-feeling of the man, or not, she did not know, but no one else was put into the same compartment. She felt quite grateful to the man, as the train steamed on, and she lay back on the well-padded seat.

The train was express, and she reached the station where she was to descend in less than an hour and a half. Dr. Keen's house was very near. To gain its front entrance she had to pass the large playground. The boys were out for their mid-day play, and Dick Davenal's roving eye caught sight of her. He climbed over the railings, in spite of rules, and burst into tears as he laid hold of her. Sara had pictured the two boys in apple-pie order in their new mourning, quiet and subdued; but here they were in their ordinary clothes, dirty and dusty, and Dick had a woful rent in one knee.

"Oh, Sara! is it all true? Is he really dead and buried? Couldn't he cure himself?"

She subdued her own emotion — it was only in accordance with the line she had laid down for herself. She kissed the boy in the face of the sea of eyes peering through the rails, and held him near as they advanced to the house. Leo, less daring than Dick, had gone round by the gate, and Sara drew him on her other side as he came running up.

She sat down in the room to which she was shown, holding the sobbing boys to her. As she had said to her aunt, Dick had a tender heart, and his sobs were loud and passionate. Leo cried with him. She waited to let their emotion have vent, holding their hands, bending now and again her face against theirs.

"*Couldn't* he be cured, Sara?"

"No, dears, he could not be cured. It was God's will to take him."

"Why didn't you have us home? Why didn't you let us say good-bye to him?"

"There was no time. We thought he was getting better, and it was only quite at the very last we knew he was dying. He did not forget you and Leo, Dick. He bade me tell you — they were his own words — that Uncle Richard would have sent for you to take a last farewell, but that death came upon him too suddenly. He bade me tell you that you will meet him in that far-off land where your toils and his will be alike over; and — listen, children! — he charged you to be ever working on for it."

Their sobs came forth again. Leo was the first to speak. "Have you written to Barbadoes to tell papa?"

"Aunt Bettina has. See, dears, here are two silver pencil-cases; they were both your Uncle Richard's. The one has his crest on it; the other his initials, R. D. I thought you would like to have some little remembrance of him, and I brought them. Which will you choose, Dick? You are the eldest."

Dick took the pencils in his hand and decided on the largest, the one that bore the initials. The stone was a beautiful one, a sapphire.

"Is it real, Sara?"

"Oh yes. This is the best for you, as the initials would not stand for Leo. The other stone is real, too, Leo: opal. Try and not lose them."

"I'll never lose mine," avowed Dick. Leo only shook his head in answer, as he put the memento in his pocket.

The gifts had created a diversion, and the tears began to

dry upon their faces: schoolboys' tears are not very deep. Sara spoke of their mourning, inquiring why it was not on.

"We wore it yesterday," said Dick, "And we had holiday, we two, and stopped in Mrs. Keen's parlour instead of going into school. But the housekeeper told us to put our other clothes on this morning; she said if we wore our black suit every day, it would be done for in a week."

Not unlikely — by the specimen of the present suit Mr. Dick wore. Sara pointed to the rent in the knee.

"I know," said Dick, looking carelessly down at it. "I did it only just before I saw you, wrestling with a fellow. He says he's stronger than I am, but he isn't, so we were trying which was best man. All in good part, you know. I say, Sara, shall we come home for the holidays now, as we used to?"

"My dears, I don't know yet much about the future. It will be Aunt Bettina's home now. I think she will be sure to have you as usual."

"Why won't it be your home?" cried Dick, quickly.

"I shall live with Aunt Bettina. It will not be the same home for either of us — not the same house, I mean. I think — I don't know yet, but I think it likely Mr. Cray and Caroline will come to it. Perhaps Aunt Bettina will go to one of her own houses."

"Why can't you and Aunt Bettina stop in that?"

"It is too large for us. And the things are going to be sold."

"The things going to be sold?" repeated Dick, lifting his eyes and voice in amazement.

"Papa has so directed in his will. You know — at least I daresay you have heard — that Aunt Bettina has a great deal of very nice furniture which has been lying by in a warehouse

ever since she came to live with us. I can't tell you yet how things will be settled."

"I say, Sara, how slow and quiet you speak! And how pale you are!"

Sara swallowed down a lump in her throat. "Papa was all I had left to me, Dick. Leo, my dear, you are quiet and pale, too!"

"I say, Sara — never mind Leo, he's all right — have you got a great fortune left you? The boys here were saying you'd have such a lot: you and the captain between you."

"The boys were mistaken, Dick. Papa has not died rich. He died something else, Dick — a good man. That is better than dying rich."

"If he wasn't rich, why did he give back that money that Lady Oswald left him?"

"Oh, Dick! Do you know that the remembrance of having given back that money was one of his consolations in dying. Dick, dear, he hoped you would work on always for that better world. But the acquiring money wrongfully, or the keeping it unjustly, would not, I think, help you on your road to it."

They were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Keen, a kind, motherly woman. She insisted on Sara's taking off her bonnet and partaking of some refreshment. Sara yielded: choosing bread-and-butter and a cup of coffee. And Mrs. Keen and Dick and Leo afterwards walked with her back to the station.

CHAPTER II.

Work for the Future.

THE clocks were striking four when Sara Davenal was walking through the streets of Hallingham on her return. She stepped along rapidly, her crape veil over her face, and was molested by none with greetings or condolences: but she stopped of her own accord on meeting the poor market-woman, Mrs. Hundley. The woman, her face broken by sorrow, flung up her hands before Sara could speak.

"To think that he should have been the first to go! — before my poor boy, whose life, as may be said, he had been keeping in him! The one a-dying for months past, the other a hale gentleman as seemed to have health in him for a lifetime. Oh, miss! what will the sick do without him?"

"How is your son?" was all Sara's answer.

"He has come nearly to his last, miss. Another weak 'll see the end. When the news come out to us that the good Dr. Davenal was gone, we couldn't believe it: and my boy, he says, 'Mother, it can't be; it can't never be.' And he set on and sobbed like a child."

In spite of her efforts, the tears overflowed Sara's eyes. To have it thus brought palpably before her was more than she could bear with equanimity. "Papa is better off," was all she murmured.

"Ay, he's better off: if ever a man had done his best in this world, miss, it was him. But who'll be found to take his place?"

With the full sense of the last question echoing on her ear, Sara continued her way. At the top of the lane contiguous to their residence was Roger, standing in disconsolate idleness. With the death of his master, Roger's occupation was gone.

Sara spoke a kind word to him in passing, and met Mr. Wheatley coming out at the gate, her father's close friend of many years. A surgeon once, but retired from the profession now. He it was who was named the sole executor to the doctor's will.

The will, which was causing surprise to the curious in Hallingham, had been made in the doctor's recent illness. It directed that all property he died possessed of should be sold, and the money realised be paid at once to his daughter. Everything was left to her. In the previous will, destroyed to make room for this, Edward Davenal's name had been associated with Mr. Wheatley's: in this Mr. Wheatley was left sole executor; in fact, Edward's name was not so much as mentioned in it.

"Have you been calling on my aunt, Mr. Wheatley?"

"No, my visit was to you," he answered, as he turned indoors with her.

"I have been to see Dick and Leo," she explained. "My aunt thought I ought not to go out so soon; that people might remark upon it. But I am glad I went, poor boys!"

"People remark upon it!" echoed Mr. Wheatley. "I should like to hear them. What is there to remark upon in that? Miss Sara, I have gone through life just doing the thing I pleased according to my own notions of right, without reference to what other folks might think, and I have found it answer. You do the same, and never fear."

She led the way into the dining-room, and closed the door. She understood he wished to speak with her. The fire was burning itself out to an empty room, Miss Davenal being up-stairs. Ah, how changed the house was only in the short week or two! It would never more be alive with the tread of patients coming to consult Dr. Davenal; never more be

cheered with his voice echoing through the corridors. The dwelling's occupation, like Roger's, had gone.

Mr. Wheatley sat down in the chair that had once been the doctor's, and Sara untied her bonnet strings, and took a seat near him. The fresh newspapers, not unfolded, lay on the table as of yore: the whilom readers of them, the waiting sick, had ceased their visits for ever.

"Now, Miss Sara, I'm left sole executor to this will, as you heard read out yesterday," he began. "It states — I daresay you noted it — that things were to be disposed of with all convenient dispatch. Did you observe that clause?"

"Yes."

"Very good. Besides that, in the last interview I held with my poor friend — it was the afternoon of the day he died, as you may remember — he enjoined the same thing upon me; no delay. There was a necessity, he said, for your being put in possession of the money as soon as possible."

Sara had no ready answer at hand. She believed there might be that necessity, but did not like to acknowledge it. She took off her bonnet, and laid it beside her on the table, as if at a loss for something to do.

"Now I don't want to inquire into reasons and motives," went on Mr. Wheatley. "I'd rather not inquire into them or hear them; what your father did not see fit to tell me, I'd prefer that nobody else should tell me. I am sure of one thing: that he kept it from me either out of necessity or to spare me pain. That things had not gone very straight with him, he told me; and that, coupled with the curious will, leaving everything to you without the protection of trustees or else, does of course force me to see that there's something behind the scenes. But while I admit so much, I repeat that I do not speculate upon what it may be, even in my own mind;

nor do I wish to do so. One question I must ask you — were you in your father's confidence?"

"Yes. At least, if not quite entirely, sufficiently so to carry out all his directions and wishes. But, indeed, I may say I was in his confidence," she added with less hesitation. "He talked to me a great deal the night of his death."

"And you will be at no loss what to do with the money that shall be realised."

"None."

"That's all straight then, and I know how to set to work. My dear, it was necessary that I should just say so far, for it would not have been well for us to work at cross purposes, and I am sure you do not misunderstand me. There's something behind which is no more your secret than it is mine; it was the doctor's; and we need not further allude to it. I'll carry out his will, and you'll carry out his wishes afterwards: he hinted to me that the money would have an ulterior destination. Any suggestion you may have to make to me, you will now do with more ease than if you had supposed I was under the impression that the money was only going to you. Don't you think it was better that I should speak?"

"Indeed it was, and I thank you."

"Well, now to business. As I understand it, there's a necessity, perhaps an imperative one — in fact, the doctor told me so, for immediate action. The first consideration then is, when shall you be prepared to leave the house? Measures will be taken to put it up for sale, and there's not the least doubt of its finding a ready purchaser, for it's one of the best houses in Hallingham, and in its best part. That will be easy. The next thing will be the sale of the effects. Of course the sooner you leave the house, the sooner they can be sold."

It quite wrung her heart to hear him speak of all this in

the dry tone of a man of business. She did what she could to bring her mind to bear it equably, heedless of the pain.

"It depends upon my aunt, Mr. Wheatley. So far as I am concerned I could be out in a few days; but she will have her home to fix upon. I had better speak to her. Papa said, when he was dying, that he thought Mark Cray ought to leave the Abbey and come here."

"Mark Cray? Well, he has the most right to do so; he was your father's partner. I never thought of him. Of course he will; *he'll* not let it slip through his fingers. The mere taking this house would be a certain practice for any one. Mark Cray has his practice ready cut and dried to his hand, but he'll not let the house go by him."

"Mr. Cray has just furnished the Abbey."

"But perhaps he — however, it will be well that somebody should see him, and ascertain what his wishes may be. It is a pity but he had money; he might purchase the house. By the way, there's that Chancery money come or coming to his wife!"

Sara shook her head. "That money is to be settled upon her. It was one of papa's last injunctions."

"Well; and how can that be better done than by buying freehold property, such as this? It will be the very thing for them, I should say. Let them buy this house and settle it upon her; it will be a capital investment. As to the furniture, if they don't care to buy that, it must be sold. Suppose you ask Miss Davenal when she shall be ready to vacate it; and, meanwhile, I'll see Mr. Cray."

He was a man of prompt action, this old friend of Dr. Davenal's, and he rose as he spoke, shook hands with Sara, and bustled out so hastily that even attentive Neal did not catch him up in time to close the hall-door behind him. Sara supposed he was going then and there to Mark Cray's.

She took her bonnet in her hand and went slowly up the stairs. It was not a pleasant task, this question that she had to put to her aunt, and she was glad of the little delay of even turning first into her own room to take her things off after her journey. Since the reading of the will yesterday, Miss Davenal had been in one of her most chilling moods. She had asked an explanation of Sara what was the meaning of all this, what Dr. Davenal's secret was, and where the money had gone to. Sara could only evasively put her off; one of the charges enjoined on his daughter by the doctor had been — not to place Edward in the power of his aunt.

It was not that Dr. Davenal feared the loyalty and good faith of his sister; but he knew how bitterly she would judge Edward, and he was willing to spare blame even to his guilty son. It is possible, also, that he deemed the secret safest left to Sara alone. Whatever his motive, he had said to her: "I charge you, keep it from your Aunt Bettina;" and Sara had accepted the charge, and meant to act upon it. But Dr. Davenal might never have left it, had he foreseen the unpleasantness it entailed on Sara.

Very curious, very cross, very deaf was Bettina Davenal as she sat in the drawing-room at her usual occupation, knitting. Her clinging mourning robes made her figure appear thinner and taller; and that, as you are aware, need not have been. She had seen from the window Sara come in, and she now thought she heard her footfall on the stairs; and her neck was thrown more upright than ever, and her lips were ominously compressed. It was this general displeasure which had chiefly caused the objection she made to Sara's visiting the boys. Sara had gone, defying her; at least, she looked upon it in that light. Was she about to defy her in all things?

She just looked up when Sara entered the room, and then

dropped her eyelids again, never speaking. Sara stood near the window, her head shaded by the half-drawn blind.

"Well, I have been, aunt."

"Been?" grunted Miss Bettina. "Not anywhere. Where do you suppose I have been? I know propriety better than to be seen streaming abroad to-day."

Sara drew a chair to the little table on which lay her aunt's pearl basket of wool, and sat down close to her. Her pale, refined face was ominously severe, and Sara's heart seemed to faint at her task. Not at this one particular task before her, but at the heavy task altogether that her life had become. It was not by fainting, however, that she would get through it, neither was it the line of action she had carved out for herself.

"I observed that I had been to see the boys, Aunt Bettina. They both send their love to you."

"I daresay they do. Especially that impudent Dick!"

"Mrs. Keen also desired to be remembered," continued Sara.

"You can send back my thanks for the honour," ironically spoke Miss Davenal. "The last time she was at Hallingham she passed our house without calling."

"She spoke of it to-day, Aunt Bettina. She nodded to you at the window, she said, and pointed towards the station: she wished you to understand that she was pressed for time."

Aunt Bettina made no answer. She was knitting vehemently. Apparently Sara was not getting on very well.

"Mr. Wheatley has been here, aunt."

"You need not tell it me. He has been dodging in and out like a dog in a fair. Anybody but he might have respected the quiet of the house on the very day after its poor master had been taken from it. He came in and went out

again, and then came in again — with you. As he *had* come, he might have been polite enough to ask for me. Neal said he wanted you. Early times, I think, to begin showing people you are the house's mistress!"

It was not a promising commencement. Sara could only apply herself to her task in all deprecating meekness.

"Aunt Bettina, he came to speak about the future. I daresay he thought you would not like to be intruded upon to-day, for he wished me to talk things over with you. He was asking when we — you — when we should be ready to vacate the house."

"To do what?" she repeated shrilly. But she heard very well. Sara was close to her and speaking in low clear tones.

"When we shall be ready to leave the house?"

"Had he not better turn us out of it to-day?" was the retort of the angry lady. "How dare he show this indecent haste?"

"Oh, aunt! You know it is only in accordance with papa's will that he has to do it. You heard it read. You read it to yourself afterwards."

"Yes, I did read it to myself afterwards: I could not believe that my brother Richard would have made such a will, and I chose to satisfy myself by reading it. Everything to be sold, indeed; as if we were so many bankrupts! Hold your tongue, Sara! Do you think I don't grieve for the loss of the best brother that ever stepped? But there are matters a-gate that I don't understand."

"There's a necessity for the things being sold, Aunt Bettina."

"He told me so before he died: *you* need not repeat it to me. Where's the money to be paid to?"

"And therefore Mr. Wheatley is desirous that there

should be no unnecessary delay," Sara continued, a faint colour tinging her cheek at the consciousness of evading her aunt's question. "He does not ask us to go out at once, Aunt Bettina: he only wishes to know when we shall be ready to go out."

"Then tell him from me that *I* will be no hinderance," retorted Miss Bettina, her temper rising. "To-morrow — the next day — the day after — any day he pleases, now, or in a month to come. I can get a lodging at an hour's notice."

"Aunt, *why* are you so angry with me?"

The burst came from her in her pain and vexation. She could not help feeling how unjust it was to cast this anger upon her; how little she had done to deserve it. Miss Bettina knitted on more fiercely, declining an answer.

"It is not my fault, aunt. If you knew — if you knew what I have to bear!"

"It is your fault, Sara Davenal. What I complain of is your fault. You are keeping this secret from me. I don't complain that they are going to sell the chairs and tables: Richard has willed it so, and there's no help for it: but I don't like to be kept in the dark as to the reason, or where the money is to go. Why don't you tell it me?"

It was a painful position for Sara. She had always been dutiful and submissive to her aunt: far more so than her brothers or Caroline had been.

"Aunt Bettina, I cannot tell you. I wish I could."

"Do you mean to imply that you do not know it?"

"No, I don't mean that. I do know it. At least, I know it partially. Papa did not tell me quite all."

Miss Bettina's usually placid chest was heaving with indignation. "And why could he not tell me, instead of you? I think I am more fit to be the depositary of a disgraceful

secret than you are, a child! And I expect it is a disgraceful one."

Ah, *how* disgraceful Sara knew only too well. She sat in silence, not daring to acknowledge it, not knowing what to answer.

"Once for all — will you confide it to me?"

Sara believed, as it had come to this, that it would be better if she could confide it to her; but the injunction of Dr. Davenal was a bar; and, that, she felt it her duty religiously to obey. In her deep love for her father, she would not cast the onus of refusal upon him, preferring to let it rest on herself.

"Believe me, aunt, I *cannot* tell you. I am very sorry; I wish I did not know it myself. It — it was papa's secret, and I must not tell it."

In the twitching of her hands Miss Bettina contrived to throw down the ball of wool. Sara picked it up, glad of the little interlude.

"Aunt Bettina, we could not have stayed on in this large house."

"Did I say we could?" asked Miss Bettina. "Not now, when all your money's gone in ducks and drakes."

"Papa — papa could not *help* the money going," she returned, her heart swelling in the eager wish to defend him. "He could not help it, Aunt Bettina."

"I am not saying that he could. I am not casting reproach on him. It is not to be supposed, had he been able to help it, that he would have let it go. How touchy you are!"

A silence, and then Sara began. She mentioned what Mr. Wheatley had said, that the house might be a good investment for the money of Caroline; and Miss Bettina, not at all a bad woman of business, was struck with the sugges-

tion. She sat revolving it in silence, apparently only intent on her knitting. She supposed it could be so settled on Mark's wife, but she did not understand much of what the law might be. The thought struck her that this ought to be seen about at once.

"Mr. Wheatley thinks it would be so much better if these things could be taken too by whoever succeeds to the house," proceeded Sara. "So as to avoid a public auction."

Now that was one of the sore points troubling Miss Davenal — the prospect of selling the things by public auction. She had a most inveterate hatred to any such step, looking upon all sales of furniture, no matter what the cause of sale, as a humiliation. Hence the motive which had induced her to warehouse her handsome furniture instead of selling it; when, years ago, she gave up housekeeping to take up her abode at Dr. Davenal's.

"Others knew that, before Mr. Wheatley," she said ungraciously. "A public auction in this house! I would not stop in the town to see it. Has old Wheatley spoken to Mark?"

"It struck me he was going to Mark's when he left here," replied Sara. "I am not sure."

Miss Davenal grunted as she went on with her knitting. She herself always liked to be "sure:" so far as her deafness allowed her. Turning to glance at the timepiece, she crossed the room and opened the door. There stood Neal.

Neal at his eaves-dropping, of course. And the black robes of his mistress were so soft, her footfall so noiseless on the rich carpet, that Neal's ear for once failed him. But he was not one to allow himself to be caught. He had the coal-box in his hand, and was apparently stooping to pick up a bit of coal that had fallen on the ground. Miss Davenal would

as soon have suspected herself capable of listening at doors, as that estimable servant, Neal.

"Let the dinner be on the table to the moment, Neal," were her orders. "And I shall want you to attend me abroad afterwards."

"Are you going out, Aunt Bettina?" Sara ventured to inquire.

"Yes, I am," was the sharp answer. "But not until the shades of night shall be upon the streets."

Sara understood the covert reproach. Her aunt's manners towards her had settled into a cold, chilling reserve. Sara wondered if they would ever thaw again.

Miss Davenal made her dinner deliberately: she never hurried over anything: and went out afterwards on foot, attended by Neal. Sara judged that she was going to the Abbey, but she did not dare to ask. She, Sara, went to the drawing-room, from old custom; shivering as she stepped up the wide staircase: not from cold, but from the loneliness that seemed to pervade the house. She had not got over that sense of strange nameless dread which the presence of the dead imparts and leaves behind it. The drawing-room was lighted as usual: no alteration had been made in the habits of the house; but as Sara glanced round its space, a nervous superstition began to creep over her. Perhaps the bravest of us have at times experienced such. A moment after, Watton appeared showing in a visitor: Mr. Oswald Cray.

Every pulse of her body stood still, and then bounded onwards; every thrill of her heart went out to him in a joyous greeting. In this dreadful sorrow and sadness, he had but been growing all the dearer.

He was still in deep mourning for Lady Oswald. He looked taller, finer, more noble than of yore, or she fancied it, as he bent a little to her and took her hand, and kept it. He

saw the quiver of the slight frame; he saw the red rose that dyed the pale cheeks with blushes, and Mr. Oswald Cray knew that he was not forgotten by her, any more than she was by him. But he knew also that both of them had only one thing to do — to bury these feelings now, to condemn them to oblivion for the future. The daughter of Dr. Davenal dead, could be no more a wife for him, Oswald Cray, than the daughter of Dr. Davenal living, and most certainly he was the last man to be betrayed into forgetting that uncompromising fact.

The rose blush faded away, and he saw how weak and worn was her cheek; young, fragile, almost childish she looked in her evening dress of black, the jet chain on her white shoulders. Insensibly his voice assumed a tenderness rarely used to her, as he apologised for calling at that hour: but he was only passing through the town and would leave it again that night. "I see how it is;" he cried, "you are suffering more than is good for you."

But for the very greatest effort, the tears she had believed to have put under permanent control would have dropped then. A moment's pause for calmness, and she remembered that her hand was lying in his, withdrew it, and sat down quietly in a chair, pointing to one for him. But the forced calmness brought a sickness to her heart, a pallor to her aching brow.

"How shall I tell you of my sympathy in your deep sorrow? I cannot express it: but you will believe me when I say that I feel it almost as you can do. It is indeed a trying time for you; a grief which has come to you all too early."

"Yes," she gently answered, swallowing the lump that kept rising in her throat. "I have a good deal to bear."

"There is only one comfort to be felt at these times — and that the mourner can but rarely feel," he said, drawing his

chair near to her. "It lies in the knowledge, the recollection, that Time, the great healer, will bind up the sorest wounds."

"It can never bind up mine," she said, speaking in the moment's impulse. "But you are very kind; you are very kind to try to cheer me."

"I wish I could cheer you, I wish I could remove every sorrow under which you suffer! No one living would be a truer friend to you than I should like to be. How is Miss Davenal?" he continued, possibly fancying he might be saying too much, or at least that a construction he never intended might appear to belong to his words. "Watton said she was out. I suppose, in point of fact, she will not see me to-night. I know what war I wage with etiquette in being here so soon, and at this hour, and Miss Davenal is a close observer of it. Will you forgive me?"

"Indeed I am glad to see you," said Sara, simply. "I am doubly glad, for I feel almost ashamed to confess I was getting too nervous to be alone. My aunt is out; she went to the Abbey as soon as dinner was over. I am glad to see you thus early," she added, "because I have a word to say to you from — from papa."

"Yes," said Oswald, lifting his head with slight eagerness, an unusual thing for him to do.

"In the letter he wrote to you, and which I sent — the letter you received," she continued, looking at him and pausing.

"Yes?"

"He spoke of Mrs. Cray's money in it, as he told me. He wished you to interest yourself and see that it was settled upon her. When he wrote that letter, he was almost past exertion, and had to conclude it abruptly, not having said so much as he wished to say. Therefore he enjoined me to urge

it upon you from him. He thought — I believe he thought that Mark Cray was inclined to be careless, and that the money might be wasted unless some one interfered. That was all."

"I shall speak to Mark. Most certainly I will urge the settlement of the money on his wife, should there be occasion for it; but I imagine Mark will naturally so settle it without any urging. It is quite incumbent on him to do so, both as a matter of prudence and that it is his wife's money, not his."

"I don't think Mark has much notion of prudence," she rejoined.

"I don't think he has, in a general way. But the most careless would surely act in accordance with its dictates in a case like this. I am going to the Abbey presently."

"I fancy that papa thought — or wished — that you would be one of the trustees, should trustees be required."

"I should have no objection," said Oswald, after a pause. "But — to go to another subject, if you can bear me to touch upon it — was not Dr. Davenal's death sudden at the last?"

"Quite at the last it was. He had some days of dangerous illness, and he rallied from it, as we all supposed. It was thought he was out of danger, and he sat up: he sat up for several hours — and died."

She spoke the words quietly, almost as she might have told of the death of one not related to her, her hands clasped on her lap, her face a little bent, her eyelids drooping. But Oswald Cray saw that it was the calmness that proceeds from that stern schooling of the heart which can only be enforced by those heavy-laden with hopeless pain.

"He died sitting up?"

"Yes. It was getting late, but he would not return to bed. He had been talking to me about many things; I was

on a low seat, my head leaning against him. He died with his arm round me."

"What a trial! What a shock it must have been!"

"I had no idea he was dead. He ceased talking, and I remained quiet, not to disturb him. My Aunt Bettina came in, and saw what had happened."

He scarcely knew what to say in answer. All comments at such a time are so grievously inadequate. He murmured some words of pity for the fate of Dr. Davenal, of compassion for her.

"It is Hallingham that deserves, perhaps, most of real pity," she resumed, speaking in this matter-of-fact way that she might succeed in retaining her composure. "I do not know who will replace my father: no one, I fear, for a long while. If you knew how he is mourned —"

She stopped, perhaps at a loss for words.

"Did he suffer much?" asked Mr. Oswald Cray.

"He suffered here" — touching her chest — "but the pain ceased the last day or two, and the breathing got better. He had a great deal of pain of mind — as — perhaps — you — know. He was quite resigned to die: he said God was taking him to a better home."

Still at cross purposes. Sara's hesitating avowal pointed to a different cause of mental pain from that assumed by Oswald Cray.

"Yes," he at length said, abstractedly, for neither spoke for a few minutes, "it is a loss to Hallingham. This will be sad news to write to your brother."

"It is already written. The mail has been gone a day or two. Oh yes! it will be grievous news for Edward."

The last words were spoken in a tone of intense pain. She checked it, and began talking of her aunt, of Caroline, of anything; almost as if she doubted herself. She told him she

had been out that day to see the two little boys. At length he rose to leave.

"Will you not stay and take some tea? I do not suppose my aunt will be long."

He declined. He seemed to have grown more cold and formal. Until he took her hand in leaving, and then the tender tone of voice, the pleasant look of the eye shone out again.

"May Heaven be with you, Miss Davenal! — and render your future days happier than they can be just now. Fare you well! I hope to hear good news of you from time to time."

Which was of course equivalent to saying that he should not be a visitor. She had not expected that he would be. He turned back ere he gained the door.

"If I can be of service to you at any time or in any way, I hope you will not hesitate to command me. Nothing would give me so much gratification as the being of use to you, should need arise."

It was very polite, it was very kind, and at the same time very formal. Perhaps the strangest part throughout the interview to Sara's ears was that when he had called her "Miss Davenal," for it presented so great a contrast to the past: the past which was at an end for ever.

He went out, shown through the hall by Jessy, and leaving his card on the standing waiter for Miss Davenal. All *en règle*. And Sara in the large drawing-room, so dreary now, remained on in her pain, alone.

CHAPTER III.

Mark's New Plans.

IN the dining-room at the Abbey, in her black robes, sat Mrs. Cray at the head of her table, her elbow resting on it, and a pouting expression on her pretty face. Mark was at the foot, gobbling down his dinner with what haste he could. He had been detained so long beyond the dinner hour that Mrs. Cray in despair had eaten hers; and when Mark at length entered, he found a cold face and a cold cutlet. Mrs. Cray was beginning to tire of the irregularity.

"I can't help it, Carine," he said, looking at her in a pause of his eating. "My work has been nearly doubled, you know, since the doctor died."

"But it's very tiresome, Mark!"

"It is. I am nearly sick of it."

"It is not *doubled*, your work."

"Well, no; one speaks at random. Some of the doctor's older patients have left me: they think, I suppose, I am not sufficiently experienced. But I have a great deal to do just now; more, in fact, than I can attend to properly."

Mark resumed his gobbling, and his wife watched him, her lips a little relaxing. Caroline Cray was one of those who must have all things go smoothly; she could not bear to be put out, even in trifles.

"Mr. Wheatley has been here, Mark," she presently said.

"What did he want?"

"Well, he wanted to see you. Something about the selling of my uncle's house."

"He is losing no time," observed Mark, acrimony in his tone. "I wonder he didn't begin about it yesterday when we were there, hearing the will read? But what have I to do with it?"

"He wants us to take the house — to buy it, I think."

"I daresay he does," retorted Mark, after a pause of surprise. "Where's the money to come from!"

"There's that money of mine. He said it would be a good investment."

"Did he! I wonder what business it is of his! Carine, my dear, you and I are quite capable of managing our own affairs, without being dictated to."

"Of course we are!" answered Carine, rather firing at the absent Mr. Wheatley, as this new view was presented to her.

Mark said no more just then. He finished his dinner, and had the things taken away. Then, instead of sitting down to his wine, his usual custom, he stood up on the hearth-rug, as though he were cold — or restless. Mark Cray had been reared to extravagance in a petted home, and looked for his wine daily, as surely as any old alderman looks for it. Oswald Cray, reared without a home, and to schoolboy fare, adhered still, in a general way, to the water to which he had been trained. Oswald's plan was the most profitable, so far as the pocket was concerned, and the health, too.

"I say, Carine, I want to go to London for a day."

"To London?" echoed Carine, turning her chair to the fire, and facing Mark.

"There's the grandest opening: there's the grandest opening for a fortune to be made there. And — Carine — I think I shall quit Hallingham."

Mrs. Cray's violet eyes extended themselves in the extreme of wonder. She sat staring at him.

"Caroline, I *hate* the profession, and how I came ever to be such a fool as to go into it I cannot understand," said Mark, throwing himself on a chair as he plunged into confidence.

"So long as the doctor lived, I could not well say anything

about it; I did not see my way clear to do so. But things have altered now, and I think I shall give up the medical life."

"But — good gracious, Mark! — I can't understand," exclaimed Caroline, in her bewilderment. "If you give up your profession, you give up our means of living. We can't starve."

"Starve!" laughed Mark. "Can't you trust me better than that? Look here, Caroline; let us come to figures. I don't suppose I should clear at first above eight hundred a-year, or so, by the practice —"

"Oh, Mark!"

"Well, say a thousand for argument's sake. Let us assume that I net it clear. It's a nice income, no doubt, but I shall make three times that, if I go into the thing in London."

Caroline, half doubting, half eager, all bewildered, sat waiting to hear more.

"There's a splendid opportunity offered me if I give up the medical profession and embark altogether in a new line of life. I — you have heard me speak of my old chum Barker, have you not?" he broke off to ask.

"Barker?" she repeated. "Yes, I think I remember the name. He got into some dreadful trouble, did he not, and was sent to prison?"

"Sent to prison! how you speak of things! All that's over and done with. His friends were wretched screws, doing him out of money that ought to have come to him, and the consequence was that Barker got into the Queen's Bench. Half the gentlemen of England have been there some time in their lives," added Mark, loftily, as if he were just then deeming the thing an honour. "Well, Caroline, that was over long ago, and Barker has now the most magnificent prospect before him that one can well imagine; he will be making his thousands and thousands a-year."

"How is he going to make it?" asked Caroline.

"And he has offered me a share in it," continued Mark, too eager to attend to irreverent questions. "He is one who knows how to stand by an old friend. *Thousands* a-year, it will be."

"But, Mark, I ask you how he is going to make it?"

"It is connected with mines and pumping, and all that sort of thing," lucidly explained Mark.

"Mines and pumping!"

"Caroline, dear, you cannot be expected to understand these things. *Enormous* fortunes are being made at them," continued Mark, in a rapture. "Some of the mines yield fifty thousand pounds profit the first year of working. I declare when I first heard of Barker's prospects I was fit to eat my fingers off, feeling that I was tied down to be a paltry pitiful country surgeon. Folks go ahead now-a-days, Caroline. And, as Barker has generously come forward with the offer that I should join him, I think I ought to accept it in justice to you. My share the first year would be about three thousand, he computes."

"But, Mark, do you mean to say that Mr. Barker has offered you three thousand a-year for nothing? I don't comprehend it at all."

"Not for nothing. I should give my services, and I should have to advance a certain sum at the onset. Talk about an investment for your money, Caroline, what investment would be equal to this?"

The words startled her for the moment. "I promised poor Uncle Richard that the money should be settled upon me, Mark. He said he urged it as much for your sake as mine."

"Of course," said Mark, with acquiescent suavity. "Where there's nothing better to do with money it always ought to be so settled. But only look at this opening! Were your Uncle

Richard in life, he would be the first to advise the investment of the money in it. Such chances don't happen every day. Caroline, I can't and I won't humdrum on, here, buried alive and worked to death, when I may take my place in the London world, a wealthy man, looked up to by society. In your interest, I will not."

"Are the mines in London?" asked Caroline.

"Good gracious, no! But the office is, where all the money transactions are carried on."

"And it is quite a sure thing, Mark?"

"It's as sure as the Bank of England. It wants a little capital to set it going, that's all. And that capital can be supplied by your money, Caroline, if you will agree to it. Hundreds of people would jump at the chance."

An utter tyro in business matters, in the ways of a needy world, imbued with unbounded faith in her husband, Caroline Cray took all in with eager and credulous ears. Little more than a child, she could be as easily persuaded as one, and she became as anxious to realise the good luck as Mark.

"Yes, I should think it is what my uncle would advise were he alive," she said. "And where should we live, Mark?"

"We'd live at the West End, Carine; somewhere about Hyde Park. You should have your open and close carriages, and your saddle-horses and servants — everything as it ought to be. No end of good things may be enjoyed with three thousand a-year."

"Would it stop at three thousand, Mark?" she questioned, with sparkling eyes.

"I don't expect it would stop at twenty," coolly asserted Mark. "How far it would really go on to, I'm afraid to guess. In saying three thousand, I have taken quite the minimum of the first year's profits."

"Oh, Mark! don't let it escape you. Write to-night and

secure it. How do you know but Barker may be giving it to somebody else?"

She was growing more eager than he. In her inexperience, she knew nothing of those miserable calamities; failure, deceit, fruition deferred. Not that her husband was purposely deceiving her: he fully believed in the good luck he spoke of. Mark Cray's was one of those sanguine, roving natures which see an immediate fortune in every new scheme brought to them — if it be only wild enough.

"How long have you known of this, Mark?"

"Oh, a month or two. But, as you see, I would not stir in it. I should like to run up to town for a day to meet Barker; and, on my return, we'd set about the arrangements for leaving. There will be no more lonely dinners for you, Carine, once we are away from here. I shall not have to be beating about all hours and weathers from one patient's door to another, or dancing attendance on that precious infirmary, knowing that you are sitting at home waiting for me, and the meal getting cold."

"Oh, Mark! how delightful it will be! And, perhaps, you would never have risen into note as my uncle did."

"No, I never should. Dr. Davenal's heart was in his profession, mine—"

Mark Cray stopped abruptly. The avowal upon his lips had been "mine recoils from it."

It was even so. He did literally recoil from his chosen profession. Unstable in all his ways, Mark had become heartily sick of the routine of a surgeon's life. And since the affair of Lady Oswald, a conviction had been gradually taking possession of him that he was entirely unfitted for it: nay, that he was incompetent. To betray his incompetency, would be to lose caste for ever in the medical world of Hallingham.

Mark Cray rose from his chair again, and stood on the rug

as before, pushing back his hair from his brow incessantly in the restlessness that was upon him. He was always restless when he thought of that past night; or of the certainty that he might at any time be called upon to perform again what he had failed in then. It was not altogether his *skill* he doubted, for Mark Cray was a vain and self-sufficient man; but he felt that the very-present consciousness of having broken down before, would induce a nervousness that might cause him to break down again. Had it been practicable, Mark Cray would have taken flight from Hallingham and the medical world that very hour, and hid himself away from it for ever.

"It has become *hateful* to me, Carine!"

The words burst from him in the fulness of his thoughts. Both had been silent for some minutes, and they sounded quite startling in their vehemence. Mrs. Cray looked up at him.

"What do you mean, Mark? What has? The getting your meals so irregularly?"

"Yes," said Mark, evasively. He did not choose to say that it was his profession which had become hateful to him, lest Mrs. Cray might inquire too closely why. And, besides all this, had Mark been ever so successful in his practice, the vista opened to him of unlimited wealth (and he really so regarded it) might have turned a steadier head than his. His friend Barker had been Mark's "chum" (you are indebted to Mark for the epithet) at Guy's Hospital, and the intimacy had lasted longer than such formed intimacies generally do last. Mr. Barker was of the same stamp as Mark — hence, perhaps, the duration of the friendship; he had practised as a surgeon for a year or two, and then found it "too slow," and had tried his hand at something else. He had been trying his hand at something else and something else ever since, and somehow the things had dropped through one after the other with

various degrees of failure, one degree of which had been to land Mr. Barker within the friendly walls of a debtor's prison. But he had come on his legs again; such men generally do; and he was now in high feather as the promoter of a grand mining company. It was this he had invited Mark to embark in; he wrote him the most glowing accounts of the fabulous sums of money to be realised at it; he believed in them himself; he was, I have said, exactly the same sort of man as Mark.

One little drawback had recently presented itself to Barker: a want of ready money. Mark, in his eagerness, offered the sum coming to his wife from the Chancery suit; they were expecting it to be paid over daily; and Mr. Barker was in raptures, and painted his pictures of the future in colours gorgeous as those of a Claude Lorraine. Caroline might have felt a little startled, had she known Mark had already promised the money, without so much as consulting her. But Mark had chosen to take his own time to consult her, and Mark was doing it now. Perhaps he had felt it might be more decent to let poor Dr. Davenal be put under the ground, before he spoke of applying the money in a way so diametrically opposed to his last wishes.

He drew a letter from his pocket, one received that morning, and read out its glowing promises. Mr. Barker was evidently fervent in his belief of the future. Caroline listened as in a joyous dream: the imaginary scene then dancing before her eyes of their future greatness, rivalled any of the scenes of fairyland.

"You see," said Mark, "Barker — who's that?"

The entrance of a visitor into the hall had caused the interruption. Caroline bent her ear to listen.

"It is Aunt Bettina!" she exclaimed. "I am sure it is her voice, Mark. Whatever brings her here to night?"

Mark crunched the letter into his pocket again. "Mind,

Caroline, not a word of this to her!" he exclaimed, laying his hand on his wife as she was rising. "It is not quite ready to be talked of yet."

Miss Davenal entered at once upon the subject which had brought her — their quitting the Abbey for the other house. Mark understood she had come, as it were, officially; to fix time and place and means; and he had no resource but to tell her that he did not intend to enter upon it; did not intend to embark Caroline's money in any such purpose; did not, in fact, intend to remain in Hallingham.

There ensued a battle: it was nothing less. What with Miss Davenal's indignation and what with Miss Davenal's deafness, the wordy war that supervened could be called little else. Caroline sat pretty quiet at first, taking her husband's side now and then.

"You tell me you are going to leave Hallingham, and you won't tell me where you are going, or what you are going to do, Mark Cray!" reiterated Miss Davenal.

"I'll tell you more about it when I know more myself."

"But you can tell me what it is; you can tell me where it is. Is it at one of the London hospitals?"

"It is in London," was Mark's answer, allowing the hospital to be assumed.

"Then Mark Cray, you are very wicked. And you," — turning to Caroline — "are foolish to uphold him in it. How can you think of giving up such a practice as this?"

"I am tired of Hallingham," avowed Mark with blunt truth, for he was getting vexed.

"You are — what?" cried Miss Davenal, not catching the words.

"Sick and tired of Hallingham. And I don't care who knows it."

Miss Davenal looked at him with some curiosity. "Is he gone out of his senses, Caroline?"

"I am tired of Hallingham, too, aunt," said Caroline, audaciously. "I want to live in London."

"And the long and the short of it is, that we mean to live in London, Miss Bettina," avowed Mark. "There. I don't care that my talents should be buried in a poking country place any longer."

She looked from one to the other of them; she could not take it in. Sharp anger was rendering her ears somewhat more open than usual.

"Buried! — a poking country place! And what of the twelve or fifteen hundred a-year practice that you would lightly throw away, Mark Cray?"

"Oh, I shall do better than that in London. I have got a post offered me worth double that."

She paused a few moments. "And what are you to give for it?"

"Never mind that," said Mark.

"Yes, never mind that," rejoined Miss Bettina in a tone of bitter sarcasm. "When it comes to details, you can take refuge in 'never mind.' Do you suppose such posts are given away for nothing, Mark Cray? Who has been befooling you?"

"But it will not be given for nothing," cried Caroline, betrayed to the injudicious avowal by the partizanship of her husband. "The money that is coming to me will be devoted to it."

This was the climax. Miss Bettina Davenal was very wroth; wroth, however, more in sorrow than in anger. In vain she strove to sift the affair to the bottom; Mark baffled her questions, baffled her indignant curiosity, and — it must be confessed — his wife helped him.

She — Miss Bettina — turned away in the midst of the storm. She took up her black gloves, the only article of attire that she had removed, and drew them on her trembling hands. In the shaking of the hands alone did Bettina Davenal ever betray emotion: those firm, white, rather bony hands, usually so still and self-possessed.

“Marcus Cray, as surely as that you are standing now before me, you will rue this work if you carry it out. When that day shall come, I beg you — I beg *you*, Caroline — to remember that I warned you of it.”

She passed out without another word, and stalked down the lighted street, uncomfortably upright, Neal behind her with his ginger tread.

CHAPTER IV.

Is Mark in his Senses?

MIDWAY between the Abbey and her own home — it was in the corner just before coming to the market-place — Miss Davenal encountered Mr. Oswald Cray.

“Is Mark in his senses?” was her abrupt greeting to him, as he lifted his hat.

“What is the matter with him? — What is he doing?” asked Oswald, all in wonder.

Miss Davenal paused. Either she did not hear the question or she took time to recover herself to reply to it. Her face was very pale, her cold grey eyes glittered like steel in the lamplight.

“My poor brother has died young, and left this valuable practice in Mark’s hands. There are not many like unto it. The house it ready to be offered to him: altogether, the career spreading out before him is a fine one. And he is talking of throwing it up. He is going to fling it from him as

a child flings a pebble away into the sea. He says he shall quit Hallingham."

"Quit Hallingham!" repeated Oswald Cray, the last words of what she said alone making their full impression on him in his bewildered surprise. "Mark says he shall quit Hallingham?"

"He has some wild-goose scheme in his head of setting up in practice in London," said Miss Davenal, speaking in accordance with the notion she had erroneously assumed. "It is something he is about to purchase. He is going to purchase it with that money of Caroline's. But he has as surely lost his senses as that we are here."

"I cannot understand it," said Oswald. "No man in his senses would abandon such a practice as this."

"Just so. But I tell you he is not in his senses: he cannot be. I do not understand it any more than you. Perhaps you will see him?"

"I will. I am going there now. I have been calling at your house, Miss Davenal. Now that I have met you, will you let me express my deep sympathy in your sorrow for the loss you have sustained."

"Thank you, sir. It has been the greatest blow I could have experienced, and if I have not shown it much outwardly — for it is not in my nature to show such — it has done its work on my heart. There are few men who could not have been spared in Hallingham, whether to the town or to his family, better than Dr. Davenal."

"It is frequently the case," said Oswald, half abstractedly, "that those whom we think we could the least spare, are taken. Fare you well, Miss Davenal."

Oswald Cray strode on to the Abbey, the strange news puzzling him much. He did not take Mark at a disadvantage, as Miss Davenal had done. When he entered, Mark was all

cool and easy, having had time to collect his wits and resolve on his course of action. That course was, not to open his lips about the scheme on hand to any other living mortal until it was ripe and ready to be acted upon. Miss Davenal's communication to Oswald rendered this somewhat difficult, but Mark did not stand on an evasion or two.

He was exceedingly surprised to see Oswald, not knowing that he was at Hallingham, and Caroline gave a little scream when he came in, in her pretty and somewhat affected manner. Oswald explained that he had not come from London, but from another part of the country, and had alighted at Hallingham for two or three hours only as he passed through it. He then entered upon the strange news just communicated to him.

But Mark had his answer to it ready at hand. He talked in a mocking tone about "busybodies," he ridiculed Miss Davenal's deafness, saying that she generally heard things "double": altogether, he contrived to blind Oswald, to convince him that the whole thing was a fable; or, rather, a mistake, partly arising from Miss Davenal's infirmity, partly from a desire on his own part to "chaff" her for her interference. How Mark Cray reconciled this to his sense of honour, let him answer.

And Oswald, perfectly truthful himself, never doubted his half-brother. But he did not wholly quit the topic. He spoke of the few words written to him by Dr. Davenal when he was dying, and their purport — that he, Oswald, should urge the settlement of Mrs. Cray's own money upon her. Though of course, Oswald added, there was no necessity for him to do so: Mark would naturally see for himself that it was the only thing to be done with it.

Of course he saw it, testily answered Mark, who was growing cross.

"I cannot think how Miss Davenal could have misunderstood you as she did," proceeded Oswald. "She actually said that this money of Mrs. Cray's was to be applied to the purchase of the new thing in London in which you were proposing to embark."

"Did she!" returned Mark, in a tone that one impudent schoolboy retorts upon another. "I do wonder, Oswald, that you should listen to the rubbish picked up by a deaf woman!"

"The wonder is, how she could pick it up," returned Oswald. "But I am heartily glad it is not so. Miss Davenal assumed that you must be out of your senses, Mark," he added, a smile crossing his lips: I fear I must have arrived at the same conclusion had you really been entertaining the notion of quitting Hallingham and throwing up such a practice as this."

"I wish to goodness people would mind their own business!" exclaimed Mark, who was losing his good manners in his vexation. The communication to his wife of his new scheme had been so smoothly accomplished, that the sudden interruption of Miss Davenal and now of Oswald Cray seemed all too like a checkmate; and Mark felt as a stag driven to bay. "I am old enough to regulate my own affairs without Miss Davenal," he continued, "and I want none of her interference."

Oswald did not speak.

"And, what's more, I won't stand it," resumed Mark; "either from her or from anyone. There! And, Oswald, I hope you will excuse my saying it: although you are my elder brother and may deem you have a right to dictate to me."

"The right to advise *as a friend* only, Mark," was the reply, somewhat pointedly spoken. "Never to dictate."

Mark growled.

"With Dr. Davenal's valuable practice before you, Mark, it may appear to you quite a superfluous precaution to secure the money to your wife and children," persisted Oswald. "But the chances and changes of life are so great, overwhelming families when least expected, that it behoves us all to guard those we love against them, as far as we have the power."

"Do you suppose I should not do the best for my wife that I can do?" asked Mark. "She knows I would. Be at ease, Oswald," he added in an easy tone, of which Oswald detected not the banter, "when Caroline's money shall be paid over, I'll send you notice of it. Talking of money, don't you think the doctor made a strange will?"

"I have not heard anything about his will," replied Oswald. "He has died very well off, I suppose?"

"We don't think that he has died well off," interposed Caroline. "I and Mark can't quite make it out, and they do not treat us with much confidence in the matter. Whatever there is, is left to Sara."

"To Sara?"

"Every stick and stone," returned Caroline, her cheeks assuming that lovely colour that excitement was apt to bring to them, and which, to a practised eye, might have suggested a suspicion of something not sound in the constitution. "All the property he died possessed of is to be sold, even to the household furniture; and the money realised from it goes to Sara."

"And the son — Captain Davenal?"

"There's nothing left to him; not a penny piece. His name is not so much as mentioned in the will."

Oswald looked as though he could not believe it. He had

thought that, of all men, Dr. Davenal would have been incapable of making an unjust will.

"Look here, Oswald," interrupted Mark, speaking in that half-whispered tone that is so suggestive of mystery, "there's something under all this that we can't fathom. Caroline overheard some words dropped by Miss Davenal to the effect that Sara was left dependent upon her, quite entirely dependent —"

"But how can that be?" interrupted Oswald. "Have you not just said that the whole property is willed to her?"

"True: but Miss Davenal did say it. It is all queer together," concluded Mark. "Why should he have willed it all to Sara, excluding Edward? — And why should Miss Davenal assert, as she did, that Sara would be penniless, and must have a home with herself? I am sure I and Caroline don't want their confidence," continued Mark, in a tone of resentment that was sufficient to betray he did want it. "But I say it's a queer will altogether. Nothing left to Edward, when it's well known the doctor loved him as the apple of his eye! Every sixpence that can be realised by the sales is to go to Sara; to be paid into her hands absolutely, without the security of trustees, or guardian, or anything. But as to his having died the wealthy man that he was thought to be, it is quite a mistake. So far as we can make out, there was no money laid by at all."

Oswald did not care to pursue the theme. The disposal of Dr. Davenal's property was nothing to him; and if he could not help a suspicion crossing his mind as to how the laid-by gains of years had been spent, it was certainly not his intention to enlighten his brother Marcus. Neal had hinted at hush-money months ago, and the hint was haunting Oswald now.

"Was it not a sudden death at the last?" exclaimed Caroline.

"Very," said Oswald. "It must have been a sad shock for you all. I am sure your cousin feels it much."

"Sara? Well, I don't know. I don't think she feels it more than I do. She seems as still and calm as a statue. She never shed a tear yesterday when the will was being read: and I am sure she listened to it. I never heard a word for my sobs."

But for the melancholy subject, Oswald would have smiled at Caroline's faith in her own depth of grief. She had yet to learn the signs of real sorrow.

"She is not demonstrative, I think," he observed, alluding to Sara.

"She never was," returned Caroline: "and therefore I argue that there can be no real feeling. I have gone into hysterics ten times since the death, only thinking of it, as Mark knows: and I question if anybody has so much as seen Sara cry. I said to her yesterday, 'How collected you are! how you seem to think of everything for the future!' 'Yes,' she answered in a dreamy sort of way, 'I have got work to do; I have got work to do.' I don't know why it should be," continued Mrs. Cray, after a pause, "but in the last few months Sara seems to have altered so much; to have turned grave before her time. It is as though all her youth had gone out of her."

Oswald rose: He believed his mission had been accomplished — that there was no doubt of Mark's investing his wife's money for her benefit, in accordance with the doctor's wishes. They pressed him to remain and take some tea, but he declined: he was returning to town that night. His last words to his half-brother proved how completely he was astray.

"Mark, it would be only kind of you to set Miss Davenal right. I am sure the misapprehension was causing her serious pain."

"I'll attend to her," rejoined Mark, with a careless laugh, as he went with him to the hall door. "Good night, Oswald. A safe journey to you!"

Mark returned to his wife. He had not quite liked to use that deliberate deceit to Oswald Cray in her presence. But Mark was ingenious in sophistries, in that kind of logic which tends to "make the worse appear the better reason," and Caroline put full faith in him as she listened to his half apology, half explanation.

"It would never have done to enlighten *him*," observed Mark. "What I have said, I said for your sake, Carine. Oswald is one who would rather let a man plod on for years on bread and cheese, than see him make a dash and raise himself at once to independence. He's a slow-going coach himself, and thinks everybody else ought to be!"

And, propping his back against the side of the mantelpiece, Mark Cray enlarged upon all the grandeur and glory of the prospect opening to him, painting its future scenes in colours so brilliant, that his wife lost herself in a trance of admiration, and wished it could all be realised with the morning light.

PART THE SECOND.

CHAPTER V.

Entering on a New Home.

FOR once London was bright. A glorious spring day late in March had gladdened the spirits of the metropolitan world, dreary with the fogs and rains of the passing winter, and as the street passengers looked up at the clear blue sky, the shining sun, they said to each other that the day was a fore-taste of summer.

The sun drew to its setting, and its red rays fell on the terminus of the Great Western Railway at Paddington; on all the bustle and confusion of a train just in. Amidst the various vehicles driving out of the station with their freight, was a cab, containing two ladies dressed in deep mourning, one of whom, the elder, had not recovered from the pushing about to which she had been subjected in the confusion of arrival, and was protesting that she should not recover it, and that there ought to be arrangements made to protect lady-travellers from such. On the box beside the driver was a — was he a gentleman, or was he a servant? If the latter, he was certainly a most superior one in looks, but the idle people standing about and casting their eyes up to the passing cabs were taking him no doubt for the former. The luggage piled up on the top of the cab and on the front seat of the inside, seemed to say that these travellers had come from a distance.

In point of fact, they had come from Hallingham, for they were no other than Miss Davenal and her niece, and the gentleman on the box was Neal. Miss Davenal kept up her chorus of complaint. It had begun with the discomforts attendant on the arrival of a large train at the terminus, and it would be continued, there was little doubt, for ever and a day; for though Miss Bettina had come to London by her own free decision, she had come sorely against her will.

“Jostling! pushing! hustling! roaring! It is a *shame* that ladies should be subjected to such. Why don't they manage things better?”

“But, Aunt Bettina, you need not have been in the bustle. If you had but seated yourself in the cab, as Neal suggested, and allowed him to see after the luggage —”

“Hold your tongue, Sara. What was one pair of eyes to look after all the luggage we have got? I chose to see to it as well as Neal; and I say that the way you get pushed about is shameful. My firm belief is, we have lost at least ten of the smaller packages.”

“No, no, aunt, they are all here; I counted them as they were brought to the cab.”

“Yes, that's about all you are good for! counting the cabs! I'd spend my moments to a little more purpose. Good heavens! we shall be run down! If this is London, I wish I had never heard of it.”

The cab threaded its way amidst the crowded streets and its inmates' terrors — for Sara was little less timid than her aunt — until it drew up before a small house in Pimlico; small as compared with their house at home. Miss Davenal looked up at it and gave a groan: and Neal opened the cab door.

“Is *this* the place, Neal? It is dreadfully small.”

"I think you will find it convenient, ma'am. It is better inside than out."

Better inside than out! It was new and fresh and pleasant looking; but to poor Miss Davenal it appeared, as she had said, dreadfully small. Sara seemed less disagreeably impressed. She had not anticipated great things: and it was of very little consequence to her where she lived now. In reality, it was rather a nice house, of moderate size; but Miss Davenal was estimating it by comparison—as we all estimate things.

She turned herself about in the small passage in dismay. A door on the left led into the parlour, the room they would use for dining; about four such could have been put into the dining-room at Hallingham. The staircase would scarcely admit of two abreast; and in front of it, at the top, was the drawing-room, a light, cheerful apartment, with one large window. The furniture in these rooms was Miss Davenal's, and it crowded them inconveniently.

Dorcas, she who had lived at the Abbey with Mrs. Cray, stood there with a smiling face to receive them; and the landlady, a humble sort of person in a green stuff gown, who had the pleasure of residing in the back kitchen and sleeping in some obscure attic, came forward also. The greater portion of the house had been taken unfurnished for Miss Davenal.

"About the bed-rooms, Dorcas?" inquired Miss Davenal, in a half-frightened tone. "Which is mine?"

"Which you please to choose, ma'am," was Dorcas's answer. "The two best chambers are the one behind the drawing-room, and the one over the drawing-room."

The room over the drawing-room was the largest and best, but Miss Davenal did not like so many stairs, and resigned it to Sara. She, Miss Davenal, turned herself about in the small back room as she had done in the passage: her own

spacious chamber at home was all too present to her, and she wondered whether she should ever become reconciled to this.

Had any one told her a few short months before — nay, a few short weeks — that she should ever take up her abode in London, she had rejected the very idea as absurd, almost an impossibility. Yet here she was! come to it of her own decision, of her own accord, but in one sense terribly against her will.

Marcus Cray had carried out his plans. To the intense astonishment of Hallingham, he had rejected the valuable practice which had become his by the death of Dr. Davenal, and his mode of relinquishing it had been a most foolish one. Whether he feared the remonstrances of his brother, the reproaches of Miss Davenal, or the interference of other friends of his wife, certain it is that Mark, in disposing of the practice, had gone unwisely to work. A practice such as Dr. Davenal's, if placed properly in the market, would have brought forth a host of men eager to be the purchasers, and to offer a fair and just sum for it. But of this Mark Cray allowed no chance. He privately negotiated with a friend of his, a Mr. Berry, and sold him the good-will for little more than an old song.

In vain Miss Davenal said cutting things to Mark; in vain Oswald Cray, when the real truth reached him, came hastening down from London, in doubt whether Mark had not really gone mad. They could not undo the contract. It was signed and sealed, and Mr. Berry had paid over the purchase-money.

Then Mark spoke out upon the subject of his London prospects; he enlarged upon their brilliancy until Miss Davenal herself was for the moment dazzled. She urged on Mark the justice of his resigning to Dr. Davenal's daughter part of this purchase-money; Mark evaded it. His agreement with Dr.

Davenal, he said, was to pay to his daughter three hundred pounds per annum for five years; and provided he did pay it, it could be of no consequence whether he made it by doctoring or by other means: he should fulfil his bargain, and that was enough.

Mark had had it all his own way. The money expected by his wife had been paid over to him, and he kept it. It was a great deal less than was expected, for Chancery had secured its own slice out of the pie; but it was rather more than four thousand pounds. Mark was deaf to all suggestions, all entreaties; he completely ignored the last wishes of Dr. Davenal; turned round on Oswald, and flatly told him it was no business of his; and carried the money to London in his pocket, when he and Caroline quitted Hallingham.

They quitted it in haste and hurry, long before things were ripe and ready for them in London, Mark remarking to his wife that the sooner they were out of that hornets' nest the better — by which term he probably distinguished Miss Davenal and a few others who had considered themselves privileged to interfere, so far as remonstrance went. Caroline more than seconded all his wishes, all he did; Mark had imbued her with his own rose-coloured views of the future, and she was eager to enter on its brightness.

The next to look out for a home was Miss Bettina Davenal. Affairs of the sales and else had not been carried out so quickly and readily as Mr. Wheatley in his inexperience had anticipated, and there had been no immediate hurry for the house to be vacated. A surgeon in the town was in treaty for it, and the furniture would have to be sold by auction. Sara wondered that her aunt did not fix upon a residence, and she feared all would be scuffle and bustle when they came to leave.

But Miss Davenal had been fixing upon one in her own

mind; at least, upon the locality for one — and that was London. Never, willingly, did Bettina Davenal forego a duty, however unpalatable it might be, and she did believe it to be her duty to follow the fortunes of Caroline, and not abandon her entirely to the mercy of her imprudent, thoughtless husband. To quit Hallingham, the home of her whole life, would be a cruel trial; but she thought she ought to do so. And she bestowed a few bitter words upon the absent Mark for inducing the necessity.

Miss Bettina set about her plans. If there was one quality she was distinguishable for, above all others, it was obstinacy. Obstinate she was at all times, but in the cause of right or duty she could be unflinchingly so. Watton, their former upper-maid, was established in her new situation as house-keeper in the house of business in St. Paul's Churchyard, and Miss Davenal wrote to her and requested her to look out for a house or for a portion of one, and let her know about it. Mr. and Mrs. Cray had taken a house in Grosvenor Place, facing the Green Park, and Miss Davenal wished to be as near to them as her pocket would allow.

Watton attended to her commission. She thought that part of a handsome house would be more suitable to Miss Davenal's former position than the whole of an inferior one, and she did her best. Miss Davenal found it, as you have just seen, anything but handsome; but she had little notion of the prices asked in London, and she had limited Watton as to the house-rent she was to offer. Neal was sent up to London with the furniture, which had been warehoused for so many years; and when he returned to Hallingham, Dorcas took his place in London. Discharged by Mrs. Cray, who had not chosen to take country servants with her, she had been re-engaged by Miss Davenal, whose modest household was henceforth to comprise only Dorcas and Neal. Miss Davenal

would not part with Neal if she could help it; but she had been surprised at the man's ready agreement to stay in so reduced an establishment.

And so, before things were quite in readiness for them, Miss Davenal and Sara had come up. The furniture in the house at Hallingham was being prepared for public sale, and they hastened away, not to witness the desecration. How coldly and chilly this new home struck upon both, now that they had really entered upon it, they alone could tell. Neither slept through that first night, and they arose in the morning alike unrefreshed.

Breakfast over, Sara stood at the window. In their immediate situation all the houses were private ones, but from a proximate corner she could see the bustle of the high-road and the omnibuses passing up and down. The day was bright, as the previous one had been, giving to London its best aspect, and all the world was astir.

"And now for Mark Cray and Caroline," said Miss Bettina.

It had been Miss Davenal's pleasure that Mark Cray and his wife should be kept in ignorance of this emigration of hers to London. Neal, during his brief sojourn there, and Dorcas afterwards, had been enjoined to keep strictly clear of the vicinity of their house. Having no motive to disobey, they had complied with the orders; and Mr. and Mrs. Cray were yet in total ignorance that their relatives were so near.

She put on her things and went out, Neal, as usual, in attendance. Neal was well acquainted with the geography of the place, and piloted his mistress to the house in a few minutes' time: a handsome house, with stone steps and pillars before the door. Miss Davenal gazed at it with drawn-in lips.

"It cannot be this, Neal."

"Yes, ma'am, it is. Shall I ring?"

Miss Davenal pushed forward and rang, herself, an im-

perative peal. What right had they, she was mentally asking, to venture on so expensive a house as this must be? A footman flung open the door.

"Does Mr. Cray live here?"

"Yes," said the footman with a lofty air: as of course it was incumbent on him to put on to anybody so dead to good manners as to call at that early hour. "What might your business be?"

None could put down insolence more effectually than Bettina Davenal. She gave the man a look, and swept past him.

"Show me to your mistress, man."

And somehow the man was subdued to do as he was bid, and to ask quite humbly, "What name, ma'am?"

"Miss Davenal."

He opened the door of a room on the right, and Miss Davenal, never more haughty, never more stately, stepped into it. She saw it was of good proportions, she saw it was elegantly furnished; and Caroline, in a flutter of black ribbons on her pretty morning toilette, was sitting toying with a late breakfast.

She started up with a scream. Believing that the lady before her was safe at Hallingham, perhaps the scream was excusable.

"Aunt! Is it really you? Whatever brings you in London?"

Miss Bettina neglected the question to survey the room again. She had surveyed the hall as she came in; she caught a glimpse of another room at the back: all fitted up fit for a duke and duchess.

"Where's Mark Cray?" she cried.

"Mark has been gone out ages ago, aunt. He is deep in business now. The operations have begun."

"Who took this house?" grimly asked Miss Bettina.

"I and Mark."

"And what did the furniture cost?"

"Oh, I don't know. I don't think Mark has had the bills in yet. Why, aunt?"

"*Why!*" returned the indignant lady, in a blaze of anger. "You and your husband are one of two things, Caroline; swindlers or idiots. If you think that strong language, I cannot help it."

"Aunt Bettina!" echoed the startled girl, "what are you saying?"

"The truth," solemnly replied Miss Bettina.

CHAPTER VI.

Hope Deferred.

SOME weeks went on. The beautiful summer weather had come, and the June sun was upon the streets.

Sara Davenal stood at her chamber window looking out on the dusty road. Not in reality seeing it; for the trouble and perplexity at her heart had not lessened, and she had fallen into that habit of gazing outwards in deep thought, noticing nothing. The same habit had characterised Dr. Davenal; but at his daughter's age *he* had never known any weight of care: for years and years his path had been a smooth one — little else than sunshine. She gazed outwards on the dusty road, on the white pavement, glistening again with its heat, but saw nothing. A looker-on would have said she was an idle girl, standing there to take note of her neighbours' and the street's doings: of the trades-people calling at the opposite houses, of the servant girls flirting with them as they gave their orders: of the water-cart splashing past the corner along the public highway, but neglecting this 'quiet nook: of everything, in short, there was to see and be seen.

How mistaken that looker-on was, he could never know. Poor Sara Davenal might have been the sole living object on a broad desert plain, for all she saw of the moving panorama around her.

“Hope deferred maketh the heart sick!” When that proverb of the wise King of Israel comes practically home to our hearts in all its stern reality, we have learnt one of the many bitter lessons of life. Perhaps few have realised it more intensely than Sara Davenal had latterly been obliged to realise it. From March to April, from April to May, from May to June, week by week, and morning by morning, she had been waiting for something that never came.

A very short while to wait for anything, some of you may be thinking; not much more than two months at the most, for it is only the beginning of the blooming summer month, and they had come to London late in March. But — I believe I said the same a chapter or two ago — a space of time is long or short according as we estimate it. Two months' space may pass lightly over us as a fleeting summer's day; or it may drag its slow length along, every minute of it marking its flight upon our sick and weary hearts, with enough of agony crowded into it to make it seem a lifetime.

Sara and Miss Bettina had come up in March, and the things at Hallingham were to be sold within a few days of their departure; and in a few days after that, Sara had expected the money would be paid over to her. In her inexperience, she did not sufficiently allow for delays: yet had she been ever so experienced, she would not have supposed the delay would extend itself to this. It is not of much moment to inquire into the precise cause of this delay: it is sufficient to know that it did occur; and it gave as yet no signs that it would be speedily ended.

Sara had expected the money early in April. It did not

come. "It will be up next week," she said to herself. But the next week came and did not bring it, and she wrote to Mr. Wheatley. He hoped to realise in a day or two, was his somewhat incautious answer; but in truth he himself, not being a man of business, anticipated no vexatious delay. It was an unfortunate answer for Sara, for from that date she began to look for the money daily; and you have not yet to learn what impatience this daily waiting and expecting works in the human heart. When one morning's post passed over and did not bring it or news of it, Sara counted on it for the morrow. And the morrows came and went, on and on; and Sara wrote and wrote, until she grew sick with the procrastination and the disappointment. She had waited for this money so anxiously that it had become with her a feverish longing; something like that strange disease, *mal du pays*, as it is called, which attacks the poor Swiss, exiled from their native land. Not for the sake of the money itself, was she so troubled — you know that; but from the fear of what evil the delay might bring. In reply to the letter she had forwarded to Mr. Alfred King on the death of Dr. Davenal, that unknown gentleman, whoever he might be, had replied in a short note and a very illegible handwriting (abounding in flourishes), that he was sorry to hear of the doctor's death, but *counted* on the fulfilment of the obligations without vexatious delay. This was addressed to Miss Sara Davenal, and reached her safely at Hallingham.

Poor Sara, in her inexperience, in her dread of what this man might have in his power touching her brother, feared he might deem two or three weeks only a "vexatious delay:" and when the two or three weeks went on, and two or three weeks to those, and two or three weeks again, then it was that the dread within her grew into a living agony. Who Mr. Alfred King might be, she

knew not. On that night when she had been called down to Dr. Davenal's study and found her brother there, she had gathered from some words dropped by the doctor, in his very imperfect explanation to her, that some one else had been almost equally culpable with her brother: but who this other was, whether gentleman or swindler, whether male or female, she had no means of knowing. She did not suppose it to be Mr. Alfred King: she rather surmised that whoever it was must have gone away, as Edward had. Now and then she would wonder whether this Mr. Alfred King could be connected with the police: but that was hardly likely. Altogether, her ideas of Mr. Alfred King were extremely vague; still she could not help dreading the man, and never thought of him without a shiver.

She did not know what to do: whether to remain passive; or to write and explain that the money was coming, and apologise for the temporary delay. She felt an aversion to write: and she could not tell whether it might do harm or good. And so she did nothing: and the time had gone on, as you have heard, to June.

Sara stood at the window gazing into space, when her attention was awakened to outward things by seeing the postman turn into the street with a fleet step. Could it be the *morning* postman? Yes, it must be, for the second delivery did not take place until eleven, and it was now half-past nine. Something had rendered him later than usual.

She threw up the window listlessly. So many many mornings had she watched for the post to bring this news from Hallingham, and been disappointed, that a reaction had come, and she now *looked* only for disappointment. You will understand this. The postman was dodging from one side of the road to the other with that unnecessary waste of time and

walking (as it seems to the uninitiated) which must help to make postmen's legs so weary. He was at the opposite house now, superseding the butcher-boy in the good graces of the maid-servant, with whom he stayed a rather unnecessary while to talk; and now he came striding over. Sara leaned her head further out and saw him make for their gate.

And her pulses suddenly quickened. Even from that height she could discern — or fancied she could discern — that the letter was from Mr. Wheatley. That gentleman always used large blue envelopes, and it was certainly one such that the man had singled out from his bundle of letters. Had it come at last? Had the joyful news of the money come?

She closed the window, and ran swiftly down the stairs, and met Neal turning from the door with the letter. That official was probably not all obliged to her for demanding the letter from him so summarily. But he had no resource but to give it up.

It was from Mr. Wheatley, and Sara carried it to her room, a bright flush of hope on her cheeks, an eager trembling on her happy fingers. Mr. Wheatley did not like letter-writing, and she knew quite well that he would not have written uselessly. Opening the envelope, she found it a blank; a blank entirely: nothing even written inside it: it had but enclosed a letter for herself, which had apparently been sent to Hallingham. Oh the bitter, bitter disappointment! there was not a line, there was not a word from Mr. Wheatley!

A conviction arose that she had seen the other handwriting before. Whose was it? — it seemed to be made up of flourishes. Mr. Alfred King's! Her heart stood still in its fear, and seemed as if it would never go on again: —

“Essex Street, June 1st.

“MADAM,

“I am sorry to have to give you notice that unless the money owing to me, and which I have been vainly expecting these several weeks, is immediately paid, I shall be under the necessity of taking public steps in the matter: and they might not prove agreeable to Captain Davenal.

“I am, Madam,

“Your obedient servant,

“ALFRED KING.

“Miss Sara Davenal.”

So the first faint realisation of the haunting shadow of the past weeks had come! Sara sat with the letter in her hand. She asked herself what was to be done? — and she wished now, in a fit of vain repentance, that she had written long ago to Mr. Alfred King, as it had been in her mind to do.

She must write now. She must write a note of regret and apology, telling him the exact truth — that the sale of the different effects at Hallingham and the realisation of the proceeds had taken more time than was anticipated, but that she expected the money daily — and beg of him to wait. In her feverish impatience it seemed as if every moment that elapsed until this explanation should be delivered to Mr. Alfred King was fraught with danger, and she hastened to the room below, the drawing-room.

Her desk was there. It was generally kept in her own chamber, but she had had it down the previous evening. Neal was quitting the room as she entered: he had been putting it in order for the day. Miss Davenal was in the parlour below, where she generally remained an hour or two after breakfast.

The letter — Mr. Alfred King's letter — was spread open

before Sara, and she sat pen in hand deliberating how she should answer it, when her aunt's voice startled her. It sounded on the stairs. Was she coming up? Sara hastily placed the open letter in the desk, closed and locked it, and opened the drawing-room door. But in her flurry she left the key in the desk.

Miss Davenal was standing on the mat at the foot of the stairs. "Can't you hear me call?" she asked.

"I did hear, aunt. What is it?"

"Then you ought to have heard!" was the retort of Miss Davenal, at cross purposes as usual. "*You* are not turning deaf, I suppose?"

"What is it, aunt?" repeated Sara, going half-way down the stairs.

Instead of answering, Miss Davenal turned and went into the breakfast-room again. Sara could only follow her. Her aunt's manners had never relaxed to her from the sternness assumed at the time of Dr. Davenal's death: cold and severe she had remained ever since; but she looked unusually cold and severe now.

"Shut the door," said Miss Davenal.

Sara hesitated for a moment, more in mind than action, and then she obeyed. She had left her desk, and wanted to get back to it.

"Hold this," said Miss Davenal.

She had taken her seat in her own chair, and was cutting out some article of linen clothing that looked as long as the room. Her income was a very moderate one now, and she did a good deal of sewing instead of putting it out. Sara took the stuff in her hand, and held it while her aunt cut: an interminable proceeding to an impatient helpmate, for Miss Davenal cut only "about an inch at a time," and then drew a short thread and cut again.

"Won't it tear?" asked Sara.

"It *will* wear. Did you ever know me buy linen that wouldn't wear? I have too good an eye for linen to buy what won't wear."

"I asked, aunt, if it would not tear."

"Tear!" repeated Miss Davenal, offended at the word, — at the ignorance it betrayed. "No, it will not tear; and I should think there's hardly a parish school child in the kingdom but would know that, without asking."

Sara, rebuked, held her part in silence. Presently Miss Davenal lifted her eyes and looked her full in the face.

"Who was that letter from this morning?"

"It was a private letter, aunt."

"A what?" snapped Miss Davenal.

Sara let fall the work, and stood fearlessly before Miss Davenal. The most gentle spirit can be aroused at times. "The letter was from a gentleman, aunt. It was a private letter to myself. Surely I am not so much of a child that I may not be trusted to receive one?"

"A pri-vate let-ter! — A gentleman?" was the amazed reiteration of Miss Bettina. "*What* do you say?"

Sara stood quite still for a moment, while the faint flush that was called up died away on her cheeks, and then she bent close to her aunt's ear, her low voice unmistakably clear and distinct.

"Aunt Bettina, you knew there was some unhappy business that papa was obliged to meet — and bear — just before he died. The letter I have received this morning bears reference to it. It is from a Mr. King, but I don't know him. I should be thankful if you would not force me to these explanations; they are very painful."

Miss Bettina picked up the work, and drew at a thread until it broke. "Who is Mr. King?" she asked.

"I do not indeed know. I never saw him in my life. He had to write to me just a word about the business, and I must answer him. In telling you this much, Aunt Bettina, I have told all I can tell. Pray, for papa's sake, do not ask me further."

"Well, this is a pretty state of things for the enlightened nineteenth century!" grunted Miss Bettina. "We have read of conspiracies and Rye House plots, and all the rest of it; *this* seems a plot, I think! Have you nothing more to say?"

"No, aunt," was the low, firm answer.

"Then you may go," said Miss Bettina, twitching the work out of Sara's hand. "I can do this myself."

And Sara knew that no amount of entreaty would induce her aunt to admit of help in her cutting, after that. She went up-stairs, and met Neal coming out of the drawing-room.

"I thought you had finished the room, Neal," she said, a sudden fear stealing over her as she remembered that her desk was left with the key in it.

"So I had, Miss. I came up now for this vase. My mistress said it was to be washed."

He went down-stairs carrying it: a valuable vase of Sèvres porcelain, never intrusted to the hands of anybody but Neal. It had belonged to poor Richard — was presented to him just before he went out on his unfortunate voyage. Sara walked to her desk; it stood on the centre table. What with vases and other ornaments and superfluous articles of furniture, the room was somewhat inconveniently full. It was a good-sized room, too; nearly square, the window facing you as you entered it, and the fireplace on the right. Opposite the fireplace was a beautiful inlaid cabinet with a plate-glass

back: it had never cost less than forty pounds: but Miss Bettina had not spared money when she bought her furniture years ago. Look at the girandoles on the walls! — at the costly carpet, soft as velvet! Opposite the window stood Sara's piano, a fine instrument, the gift of her loving father on her eighteenth birthday. Altogether, the room was an elegant one, but Miss Bettina could not have reconciled herself to any other. The parlour below was a nice room also, with its handsome sideboard and its glittering mirrors: but it was smaller than the drawing-room.

Sara stood for a moment before her desk: it *looked* exactly as she left it. She turned the key and raised the lid, and saw that had anybody else done the same, Mr. Alfred King's letter was lying face upwards, and might have been read without the slightest trouble in an instant of time. Had Neal seen the letter? Would he be likely to do such a thing as raise her desk surreptitiously? Many a servant would be in a room with an unlocked desk times and again, and never attempt to peer inside it. Was it probable that Neal had any propensity for prying into affairs that did not concern him? It all lay in that.

Vexed with herself for having allowed the chance to any one, Sara carried her desk to her chamber, and sat down and wrote her note there. But she could not get the thought quite so readily out of her head: it was most inexpedient that Neal, or any one else, should see that letter of Mr. Alfred King's. There occurred to her mind something her brother Edward had once told her — about a doubt of Dr. Davenal's — as to whether Neal had not opened a note of Lady Oswald's. Suddenly she thought of the doctor's desk. If *that* had been opened! In an impulse of fear she put the key into the lock.

It would not turn. Something was the matter with the lock. Had it been tampered with? Sara's face grew hot.

Turning and twisting and pulling, but all gently, she worked the key about in the lock. No, it would not open it. In the previous summer's holidays, a certain cupboard in Watton's room down-stairs declined to be opened in just the same way, and when inquiries came to be made, Master Dick Davenal boldly avowed that, wanting some jam one day, he had opened it with another cupboard key, and so had spoiled the lock. Had this lock been put out of order in the same way? The proper key to it was always about herself.

A locksmith had to be brought in to the desk. He speedily opened it, and put the lock to rights. "It was only a ward bent," he said. Sara inquired whether he thought it had been done through a strange key being put into the lock, but she did not get much satisfaction. "Like enough it might," he said, but "sometimes them wards got out of order with their own key."

"It seems quite a common lock," remarked Sara, as she paid him.

"Laws, yes! A'most any key might open that."

"What was the matter with the desk?" questioned Miss Bettina, who met the man in the passage as he was going away.

"I don't know, aunt. It would not open: such a thing has never happened to it before. Do you remember last midsummer holidays Dick spoiled Watton's cupboard through undoing it with a false key? The man says it may have been the same case here."

And Neal, who was standing immediately opposite his young mistress, and met her eye as she spoke, heard the words with unruffled composure; not so much as a shade of change disturbing the equanimity of his impassive countenance.

CHAPTER VII.

An Unpleasant Visit.

"SET me down at Essex Street."

The request, proffered in a sweet and timid voice, was made by a young lady who had just taken her place in an omnibus. The conductor's gracious response was to shut the door with a desperate bang, and call out "hi" to the driver — as a signal that he might go on.

The young lady was too pretty not to be stared at; but the crape veil, pertaining to her handsome mourning, was not raised from before her face, as she took her seat with that quiet self-possession which rarely forsakes the gentlewoman.

You will be at no loss to guess that it was Sara Davenal. The expedition she was bound upon was one that nothing save obligation could have forced upon her — a visit to Mr. Alfred King. Her note to that gentleman had brought forth another letter from him. It was to the effect that he could not wait longer for the money without the utmost inconvenience, but he would do himself the honour of calling upon her at eleven o'clock the following morning, to discuss the matter in person.

A most unsatisfactory, dismaying communication to Sara. To receive him in her Aunt Bettina's house was out of all question; for that estimable lady would undoubtedly have insisted upon making a third at the interview. To have the secret brought home to her very hearth would be too fortunate an opportunity to miss acquainting herself with its nature and details, even though she had to draw the information from Mr. Alfred King. Sara saw what must be done, however she might dislike it; and she wrote a hasty note to

the gentleman, saying that it would not be convenient to receive him in her own house, but she would instead wait upon him in Essex Street. Hence her unwonted omnibus journey.

The omnibus dashed along on its road. It was full, and therefore there was no loitering. Leaving Pimlico behind it, it passed Charing Cross and gained the Strand. There it stopped for somebody to get out, and Sara looked up at an exclamation made by the passenger seated immediately opposite to her next the door, a lady apparently but little older than herself: a quiet, steady, self-possessed girl with a pleasing face and fair hair.

The passing of a gentleman on the pavement, close up to which the omnibus was drawn, had apparently caused the exclamation to escape her. His eyes in the same moment caught the fair face bent towards him from the door, and he approached. A bright smile greeted him, and he took her hand and kept it as they spoke together.

"You, Jane!" he exclaimed, and the voice, subdued though it was, bore a laughing sound. "It is about the last place I should have expected to see you in. I thought you and omnibuses were decided foes."

"But I am going a long way this morning; too far to walk," she answered. "We have had a letter from ——"

She bent her face lower, and the words became indistinct. The gentleman resumed.

"And you are going to inquire about it? Well, Jane, don't be in a hurry. I'll tell you why another time. Inquire particulars if you like, but fix nothing. The fact is, I have something else in view.

"Of course we'd not fix anything without consulting you," she answered, in her pleasant Scotch accent. "When will you be coming?"

"To-night, most likely. Good-by, Jane. Take care of yourself."

He released her hand, which he had been holding all the while, the conductor gave the door a bang, and the omnibus dashed on. Sara had turned white as death. A variety of emotions that she would not have cared to analyse were at conflict within her — for the voice was the voice of Oswald Cray.

And he had gone away, not seeing her. For *that* she was on some accounts thankful. He might have been as much surprised to see her in an omnibus — perhaps more so — as he was the young lady opposite; and least of all to Oswald Cray could Sara have explained the errand on which she was bent. She stole a glance at the girl's interesting face; a good and sensible face; one that might well win the regard even of Oswald Cray; and that baneful plant, jealousy, which perhaps had taken root in her heart before, suddenly shot forth its sharp tendrils into every corner. What right had she, Sara Davenal, to indulge any such passion! — had she not parted from Oswald Cray for ever?

"Did you not ask to be put down at Essex Street?"

The question aroused her from her pain. It came from the same young lady opposite, and Sara looked up with a start.

"Yes," she answered.

"Then we must have passed it, for this that we are going through is Temple Bar, and I know Essex Street is before we come to that. This young lady told you to set her down at Essex Street," she added to the conductor. And the man stopped the omnibus without offering the slightest apology.

"Thank you," said Sara to her, courteously. And she walked away with the pleasant voice ringing in her ears, and the conviction within her that it must be Jane Allister.

She walked slowly down Essex Street, looking out for the offices of Messrs. Jones and Green, and soon found them. It was a large and dusty-looking house, on the right-hand side of the street, and was apparently let out to different occupants, as there were various names on the door. The top one was "Mr. Carberry:" it was simply written in black letters on the door-post; the second was on a great brass plate, nearly as large as the post itself, "Jones and Green:" and there was another brass plate, which had on it "Messrs. Knollys, Solicitors to the Great Chwddyn Mining Company."

Sara stood still as the last words caught her eye, arrested by surprise. It was not the unpronounceable name that drew her attention; but the fact that this Great Chwddyn scheme was the very one in which Mark Cray had embarked; the El Dorado of his friend Barker; the source of Mark's present flourishing prosperity and of his future greatness.

She felt sure it was the same name, though nobody ever wrote it twice alike, and whether this, or any other, might be the correct way of spelling it, the Messrs. Knollys themselves could not have told. Mark Cray and Barker, finding the word rather difficult to the tongue, had got into the habit of calling it the "Great Wheal Bang Company," as being readier than the other: "Wheal Bang" being some technical term connected with the mine; though whether applicable to any particular stratum of its ore, or to the works, or to the mine generally, or to anything else, Sara had never yet clearly understood. "The Great Wheal Bang Mining Company," was the familiar term in Mark's mouth, and in that of others interested in the mine: so prone we are to catch up phrases: and "The Great Wheal Bang" was certainly better for English tongues than the Great Chwddyn, with its variety of spelling in uninitiated hands. For once that Sara had heard the difficult name, she had heard the easier one a hundred

times; nevertheless, now that her eyes fell upon it, she knew it to be that, and no other.

The fact in itself was not of moment to her, but thought is quick; and the thought that darted across Sara's mind was, that if Messrs. Knollys were the solicitors to this rich and important company, there might possibly be a chance of Mark Cray's or of his friend Barker's calling in at these offices at any moment, in which case they might see her. And that would not be at all convenient.

But there was no help for it. She could but go in; and the chance only added another drop to the cup of pain. Most painful was it to Sara, from more causes than one, to come thus publicly to these places of business: and to come, as may be almost said, in secret; not daring to speak of her real errand.

With her crape veil drawn more closely over her face, she stepped into the passage. A door on the left bore the words "Messrs. Knollys;" and Sara was looking around her when a young man with a paper in his hand came hastily out of it.

"Did you want Knollys's office?" he asked, in a civil tone, noting her look of indecision.

"I want Messrs. Jones and Green's."

"Up-stairs, first floor."

Sara thanked him, and passed through the inner entrance, which stood open, and ascended the stairs. In great white letters, on the door facing her at the top, she read, "Office: Jones and Green." She knocked at the door, and a middle-aged man in a seedy suit of black opened it.

"I wish to see Mr. Alfred King," she said. "Is he here?"

"Mr. Alfred King?" repeated the man. "He is not here now, and I don't know — Stay, I'll inquire."

Leaving her standing there, he retreated, and she heard a

remote colloquy carried on in an undertone. Then he came back again.

"Mr. King won't be here until twelve o'clock."

"I had an appointment with him at eleven," said Sara, wondering whether there could be any mistake.

"Perhaps so," said the man. "But he dropped us a line this morning to say he could not get here until twelve. I dare say if you come then you can see him."

He shut the door, and Sara went down-stairs again. What should she do with herself this long hour — for it was not quite eleven yet. Suddenly she bethought herself that she would go to see Watton. St. Paul's Churchyard, as Watton had told them — for she had paid Miss Davenal and Sara two or three visits since their arrival in London — was in a line with Temple Bar.

Sara walked quickly through the crowded streets. Once she stopped to look in at an attractive shop, but somebody came jostling against her, she thought purposely, and she did not stop again. She easily found the house of business where Watton now was, and its private door. Watton came forward all in surprise, and took her into a plain, comfortable sitting-room, which was her own, she said. Sara inquired if she liked the situation any better: for at first Watton had not liked it.

"Well, yes, miss, I think I do," was the woman's answer. "Use and time soften most things. There's a great deal of responsibility on me, and enough work also. What I can't get reconciled to is the dust and the noise. As to the dust and dirt, I'd never have believed in it without seeing it. Being in mourning for my late master, I have not worn white caps yet, and don't believe I ever can wear them: I'm sure I might put on three a-week and not be clean. Sometimes I wash my hands four times in a morning."

"Then think what it is for my Aunt Bettina, with her delicate hands, and her delicate lace," returned Sara. "I suppose the dirt is not quite so bad with us as it is here; but it seems as if nothing could be worse, and my aunt makes it a perpetual grievance. Shall you remain here, Watton?"

"I have made up my mind to try it for a twelve-month, Miss Sara," was the answer. "It's too good a situation to be given up lightly; and it shall have a fair trial. I miss my country life; I miss the green fields and the gossiping neighbours at Hallingham: oftentimes I wake from a dream, thinking I'm there, and then I am fit to cry with the disappointment. I fear the pleasant old times have gone away from me for ever."

"They go away from us all, Watton," was the murmured answer. "Never to return again."

"You will send the two young gentlemen to see me, Miss Sara," said Watton, as she was showing her out. "Perhaps they'd honour me by drinking tea here in the course of their holidays. My evenings are my own. Master Dick should eat as much jam as he'd like. I'd get in half a dozen pots assorted."

Sara could not forbear a smile: Dick would have gone to the other end of the kingdom for half a dozen pots of assorted jam: but it changed to gravity as she turned to Watton.

"Watton, do you know I have been so great a coward as not to ask my aunt decisively whether she intends to have them up for the holidays. I very much fear she does not; and therefore I shrink from asking, lest the fear should be made a certainty."

"Poor boys!" ejaculated Watton. "Well, of course it's all very different from what it was. Ah, Miss Sara! there are too many will find cause to miss the good Dr. Davenal!"

With the rebellious sorrow, called up by the words, rising

in her heart, Sara walked along the hot and bustling streets again. It was a little past twelve when she reached Essex Street, and in going up the stairs she happened to turn her head, and saw, stepping quickly in at the outer door, Oswald Cray. She hoped he had not seen her; she thought he had not; and she hastened on, her pulses beating. What strange coincidence could have brought him there?

Mr. Alfred King had arrived. Sara was shown through a busy room into a smaller one, long and narrow, apparently partitioned off from a third room, which she did not see. The room contained a couple of chairs, a table-desk, and a slender, dandy sort of gentleman; nothing more. He was leaning against the table, doing something to his nails with a pen-knife, an eye-glass in his eye, and a black moustache with rings at its ends curling on his lip.

"Mr. Alfred King?" she said interrogatively, for there had been no introduction.

Mr. Alfred King bowed. He removed his hat, which he had been wearing, shut up the pen-knife with a flourish of his thin white hands, courteously stepped forward, and was altogether the gentleman again.

"Miss Sara Davenal, I presume?"

How Sara entered on her task, she never knew. Its nature made her feel sadly confused and diffident, as if all self-possession had gone out of her. Whatever her brother's crime might have been, she assumed that the gentleman before her had cognisance of it; and it rendered her miserably conscious in that first moment. Very much embarrassed, and aware that she was so, she apologised for the delay in the payment of the money, stated that she expected it daily, and begged of Mr. King to be kind enough to wait a little longer. Just what she had stated in her letter: in fact she had nothing else to urge.

"I am exceedingly sorry to put you to the inconvenience of coming here, Miss Davenal," he said, in a courteous but drawling tone. "It is reversing the appropriate order of things. I should have been better pleased to wait upon you."

"But I could not make it convenient to receive you," replied Sara. "The truth is," she added, in her candour, "that my aunt, Miss Davenal, with whom I live, was not made cognisant of this business; and it was my father's, Dr. Davenal's, wish that she should not be."

"Ah, — I see," observed Mr. Alfred King, in the same drawling tone that spoke so unpleasantly of affectation, of something not *true* in his nature. "Still I feel horribly annoyed at causing you the trouble of coming here, Miss Davenal."

"Will you be so kind as to tell me the object of the interview?" she said. "For what purpose did you wish to see me?"

"Ah, yes, to be sure. The fact is, Miss Davenal, some positive understanding must be come to, as to the precise time when the money will be paid. You cannot imagine the inconvenience to which the delay has put me: and, but for the respect I once bore Captain Davenal, I would not have remained so passive as I have done."

There was a pointed stress on the word "once" that recalled the blush into Sara's cheeks, the dread to her heart. She murmured a hope that the money would be realised, and paid to him, ere the lapse of many days.

"You see, Miss Davenal, had the money no ulterior destination, it would not be of so much consequence," he resumed. "Were it due to myself only, I would wait with the greatest pleasure, no matter at what inconvenience; but that is not the

case: it is these other parties who will not be pacified. Do you comprehend me, Miss Davenal?"

"Yes, I think so," said Sara, faintly, beginning to fear the affair was more complicated than she had thought. "Who are the parties?"

Mr. Alfred King ran his white hand and its showy ring right through his black hair. "Well — I would tell you if I could, Miss Davenal: in anything that concerns myself only, you may command me as you please: but the fact is, I am not at liberty to mention the names of those parties even to you."

There was a pause, and Sara's manner for the moment grew haughtily distant. She liked his words less and less. But she recollected herself: she subdued her proud spirit. Was not Edward in his power?

"These parties have been angry at the delay," he resumed, breaking the silence that had ensued. "They have badgered the life nearly out of me over it: excuse the term, Miss Davenal, it but expresses the fact. I assure you I have had a most difficult task to keep them from proceeding to extremities. And, in short, they won't be put off longer."

"From extremities?" she repeated, the one ominous word alone catching her ear.

Mr. Alfred King looked at her, not speaking. His gaze seemed to ask her how much she knew. She did not respond to it.

"Were this unfortunate matter made public, nothing could save Captain Davenal," he resumed, in a low tone. "He is now in India, in apparent safety, but — in short, it would only be a question of time, two or three months or so. Men are brought from the ends of the world now to answer for — for crime."

Subdued as was his voice, Sara looked around in terror.

That partition, if nothing more than a partition, was probably a shallow one, allowing sound to pass beyond it.

"Be at ease," he said, detecting her fear, "we are quite alone."

"Do you know Captain Davenal?" she asked.

"Very well indeed. He and I were at one time sworn friends, constantly together. Until this unhappy affair arose to part us."

Perhaps she would have liked to ask the particulars that she did not know. But her whole heart revolted from it; it would have seemed like *acknowledging* Edward's crime.

"You see his being in India is only a temporary safeguard, and these parties who hold his safety in their hands might bring him home if they chose. It is only in compliance with my urgent entreaties that they have kept passive so long. But the delay is extending itself beyond all reason, and they — in short, Miss Davenal, they will not wait longer."

"But what can I do?" she urged in her helplessness. "I admit that the delay is vexatious — Heaven knows *I* have felt it so," she added, with a burst of feeling that would not be suppressed — "but the money *is there*; it will very shortly be forthcoming, and then it will be paid."

"Yes, I have pointed out all this to them," he said, flicking a speck of dirt off his coat. "I — I suppose there is no foreign delay or obstruction, beyond the delay caused by realising the different monies?"

His sudden penetrating glance at her, the hidden earnestness of his tone, told Sara that this was a question of importance to him. It was nearly the only point throughout the interview which had not borne to her ear and eye a vague and indefinite idea of something untruthful: untruthful in himself, his voice, and his words. Possibly he had sought the personal interview with the sole view of ascertaining this solitary

fact. An impression that it was so, passed rapidly through her mind.

"Let me thoroughly understand you," she said, following her own thoughts rather than his words. "Tell me without reserve exactly what it is you wish to know, and I will answer you to the best of my power. There is no other cause for the delay, except that the monies have not been realised so quickly as they ought to have been; no other cause whatever. Were you thinking that there was?"

"I?" and again the false, drawling tone grated harshly on her ear. "Not I, I assure you, Miss Davenal. Those parties, of whom I spoke, hinted to me that with all this delay it looked as if there were no intention to pay the money. Of course, I knew that it was nothing of the sort; that the money *must* be paid."

"The very day that the money reaches me it will be paid to you, according to the instructions of my father, Dr. Davenal," she said, impressively. "I beg you to believe this; and to convey the assurance of it to them."

"I will do so. How much longer do you suppose the delay will extend? Can you fix any definite date for the payment?"

"I wish I could. But you see it does not rest with me. A very, very short period now will, I believe, see it settled."

Mr. Alfred King mused. "I will inform them of what you say, Miss Davenal, and I do trust the period may be a short one. If protracted, I cannot answer for it that they would remain passive."

"They must be cruel men, to wish to harm Captain Davenal!"

"No," he answered. "Had they been cruel men they would not have consented *not* to harm him. It is not that,

Miss Davenal; it is the money itself that is wanted; and the delay vexes them."

She was feeling desperate, and she ventured on a bold step. "In their own interest, then, they must be cautious not to harm him. Were they to do so, they would lose the money."

"Why?"

"Because I would never pay it."

Mr. Alfred King glanced at her in surprise. All her timid hesitation of manner was gone, the expression of her face had changed to resolute bravery. "I do not pretend to entire acquaintance with the details of this unhappy business, but I understand so much, Mr. King — that this money *purchases* my brother's safety," she continued. "If that be imperilled, the bargain would be forfeited, and the money retained. The payment or non-payment of this money rests solely with me; and I should not keep faith with the other parties if they did not keep theirs with my dead father."

"There will be no question of their not keeping faith, provided they get their rights, Miss Davenal."

"And their rights — if you mean the money — they shall have; I trust speedily. I shall be only too glad to get the matter over."

"I'm sure I shall be," returned Mr. King, in a tone that was certainly a hearty one. "It will be well for all parties; *very* well for Captain Davenal."

Sara turned to the door. Mr. Alfred King took up his hat for the purpose of attending her outside.

"I am glad that you have allowed me this interview, Miss Davenal. It will be so much more satisfactory to these gentlemen now that I have seen you. Dr. Davenal's death occurring as it did, was most unfortunate. By the way, did he not leave some papers behind him?"

"There are papers in my possession relating to this affair," she answered. "I know what to do with them when the proper time shall come."

"Ah, yes, of course; doubtless," came the untrue words in their untrue tone. "Then I may rely on the very speedy receipt of this money, Miss Davenal?"

"You may rely upon having it immediately that it is paid to me. That is all, I presume, sir?"

Mr. Alfred King could not say that was not all. He gallantly offered his arm to pilot her through the busy office of Messrs. Jones and Green; but Miss Sara Davenal, with a gesture far more expressive of haughty pride than of gratitude, declined the honour. The interview was leaving a disagreeable impression on her mind, apart from its natural unpleasantness; and perhaps it was unreasonable of her, but she had taken an unconquerable dislike to Mr. Alfred King.

The stairs seemed more busy than the lawyers' room. Men, some of them rather rough-looking ones, were passing up and down. Mr. Alfred King drawled an anathema on the tenant of the second floor, Mr. Carberry. Mr. Carberry had only recently taken the rooms, and he appeared to have no ostensible occupation, save the receiving of a great many visitors and an occasional telegram. The visitors were supposed to be mostly in the sporting line; and during the holding of distant races, the passages and door would be besieged by an eager and noisy crowd: as was the case on this day.

"Three times have we had them scattered by the police," exclaimed Mr. Alfred King, unmistakably in earnest now. "And that pest Carberry — or whatever the fellow's name may be — can't be got rid of for nearly a twelvemonth to come! Knollys's have threatened to indict the landlord for a nuisance; Jones and Green have given conditional warning

to quit; and it's all of no use. The landlord went to Carberry with tears in his eyes, and told him he'd be the ruin of his house, that he'd forgive every farthing of rent, already owing, if he'd go; but Carberry coolly said he had taken it for a twelvemonth, and he should stop his twelvemonth. Miss Davenal, you cannot! Allow me!"

For Sara had come face to face with this crowd at the street-door, and commenced a struggle with them, they not being polite enough to give way in the least. Mr. Alfred King seized her arm forcibly with a view of helping her, when she was as forcibly separated from him by an authoritative hand, and found herself on the arm of Mr. Oswald Cray, his face a-blaze with haughty anger, as he turned it on Mr. Alfred King.

"Thank you, sir," he said, all the pride of the Oswalds concentrating itself in him then. "This lady is under my charge."

And Mr. Alfred King, with a somewhat subdued manner, as if he had received a check that he did not care to resist, made as polite a bow to Sara as the crowd allowed him, and disappeared from view.

Clear of the assemblage, Sara would have withdrawn her arm, but Oswald Cray held it too tightly. A moment, and he turned his face upon her, a-blaze still.

"What do you do with that man? He is not a fit acquaintance for you."

At first she could not answer. Not so much from the suddenness of the whole thing and the emotion it had brought to her, as because she did not know what explanation to give.

"In going into Knollys's office just now, I thought I saw you making your way up the stairs," he resumed. "I said to myself, that it could not be; but I was unable to get the impression from my mind, and I waited. One of Knollys's

clerks said that the young lady, gone up, had inquired for Alfred King. What can have taken you to him?"

He was growing somewhat less vehement. It had been a moment to convince him that the love, which he had safely deemed he was subduing, remained with him still in all its force. To rescue her from the undesirable companionship of Mr. Alfred King, from contact with the unhallowed crowd of gambling men, he would have parted with his life.

"I was compelled to go," she murmured; "I could not help myself."

"Compelled to go up those stairs? Compelled to pay that man a visit?"

"Yes, I was. It was as distasteful to me as it could be, but I had no resource. I went there on business which no one but myself could transact. Thank you for your protection, Mr. Oswald Cray."

She withdrew her arm now, and there was no opposition to it. Reason was resuming her seat in Oswald's mind, and he felt angry with himself for his excess of demonstration. All things considered, it had been scarcely wise.

"It is not at all a place for a young lady to go to," he resumed, as he walked by her side, and his manner became cold even to restraint. "The Knollys' are sufficiently respectable, but as much cannot be said for the tenants of the upper part of the house. You must not go to it again."

Once again, she knew she should have to go to it, but she fervently hoped that would close the matter. She wished she could tell him the nature of the business that took her there. Parted though they were, she did care to stand well in the estimation of Oswald Cray; she esteemed him still beyond any one on earth.

"I never saw Mr. Alfred King until this morning; he is no

acquaintance of mine, or ever likely to be. But he tells me he was once an intimate friend of my brother Edward's."

Oswald Cray's haughty lip took an additional curl. "He may have been looked upon as a respectable man once; but he lost himself. He is not a desirable acquaintance for you."

"I could not help myself," she answered, her cheek glowing. "It was necessary that I should see him, and the interview could not be delegated to another."

He made no reply: only continued by her side. Not until her house was nearly reached did he leave her. Then he stopped and held out his hand, but he had scarcely spoken a word to her all the way.

"Thank you for your kindness," said Sara. "But I am very sorry you should have troubled yourself to come with me. It must have broken your day greatly."

"Never mind; I shall catch it up," he answered, looking at his watch. "I do not like to see you in these London streets alone. I cannot forget that Dr. Davenal was once my dear friend, and that you are his daughter."

CHAPTER VIII.

A Flourishing Company.

THE Great Wheal Bang Mining Company had its offices in a commodious and irreproachable quarter of the city. If I give the familiar name, Wheal Bang, instead of the difficult one Chwddyn, which can only be spelt from copy, letter by letter, and perhaps wrongly then, it is to save myself and my readers trouble. Not being Welsh, they might find a difficulty in arriving at the accurate pronunciation, just as I do at the spelling. The promoter of the Great Wheal Bang Mining Company, Mr. Barker, occupied sumptuous apart-

ments in Piccadilly; and his copartner in the scheme, as Mark Cray was to all intents and purposes now, flourished in his mansion in Grosvenor Place.

The offices were undeniable in their appointments. Situation, width of staircase, size of rooms, decorations, furniture, attendants; all were of the first water. People who play with the money of others do not in general go to work sparingly; and speculative public schemes necessarily entail a large outlay. These schemes, springing up now and again in London, to the beguilement of the unwary — one in about every ten of which may succeed in the end, — have been so well described by abler pens than mine, that I might hesitate even to touch upon them, were it not that the story cannot conveniently get on without my doing so, and that I have a true tale to tell. How many hearts have been made to ache from the misery entailed by these uncertain ventures, ushered in with so much pomp and flourish, so full a promise of prosperity; and how many heads, unable to bear the weight of the final ruin, have been laid low in the grave, God alone will ever know. They have ruined thousands in body; they have ruined some in soul; and the public is not yet tired of them, and perhaps will not be to the end of time.

If you never had the chance of going to bed at night a poor man, and waking up in the morning with a larger fortune than could be counted, you might have it now. You had only to enter largely into the Great Wheal Bang Company, become the successful possessor of a number of its shares, and the thing was accomplished. For the world was running after it, and some of the applicants were successful in their request for allotments; and some were unsuccessful, and these last went away with a face as long as the Wheal Bang's own prospectus, growling out a prophecy of all manner of ill-fortune for it. Their grapes were sour. The shares were up in the market

to a fabulous premium, and a man might take half a dozen into Capel Court, and come out of it with his pockets stuffed full of gold.

Mark Cray's money had effected wonders: or rather his wife's, for hers it was. A great many of these magnificent projects are nipped ignobly in the bud, through want of a little ready money to set them fairly going. But for Mrs. Cray's thousands, Mr. Barker's mine of gold might never have been heard of by the world, and Mr. Barker's name had not attained to its enviable pre-eminence. These thousands did it all. They got up the company, they set the mine a-working, they paid for the costly offices, they dazzled the eyes of the public; they gave earnest of present wealth; they seemed to assure future success. Certainly, if any mine had ever a fair prospect of realising a golden fruition, it appeared to be the Great Wheal Bang. The working of it had begun most promisingly, and every success was fairly looked for. In calling it a gold mine just now, you of course understood that I was speaking metaphorically: for gold mines are not yet common among us, even in Wales. This very valuable mine (as it could but turn out to be) was not rich in gold, but in lead: and, as we all know, the one is speedily converted into the other. The previous autumn, in consequence of some trifling difficulty in London, Mr. Barker found it convenient to enter on a temporary sojourn at a distance; and he penetrated to a remote district of South Wales. While there, with the good luck which that gentleman believed he was born to, and should some time realise, a vein of lead was discovered of a most promising nature. He contrived to secure a large interest in it, and undertook to get up a company for the working of it.

How he would have accomplished this, or whether he ever would have accomplished it, is doubtful, had he not found a

coadjutor in Mark Cray, and an aid in Mark's money. Mark resigned the control of the money to him, and Mr. Barker did not spare it. No earthly adjunct was wanting to insure the success of the scheme, provided the mine only realised its present promises.

Has anybody, who may happen to read this, ever assisted in getting a newly-discovered mine into working order? If so, he may remember the money it cost. How it ran out of the hands like water that is poured through a broad-necked funnel, disappearing nobody knew where, and leaving little trace behind! How the pounds went, and the hundreds went, and the thousands went — if he was fortunate enough to possess thousands to go — he may not recollect without wincing, to this hour. Mark Cray's thousands went. But ere they had come quite to an end, the Great Wheal Bang Company was in full operation in London, the shareholders had answered to their calls, and the money was flowing in.

No lack of money to be feared then. And the operations at the mine were conducted on a much grander scale than heretofore, and the returns were certain to be without parallel, and Mr. Barker was in a glow of triumph, and Mark Cray in a state of ecstatic delight, and the lucky shareholders leaped up sixteen scales in the ladder of society. How many set up carriages on the strength of their future riches, it is beyond my power to tell. The money flowed down to the mine, and the works went on beautifully, and the specimens of ore that came up to town were said to be more valuable than any ore ever was before. As to Mr. Barker and Mark, their expenses were not deemed worthy of a thought: with all that money going out weekly for the mine, personal expenditure was but as a drop of water in the ocean; and of course it was unnecessary to think of limiting it. Mrs. Cray, with her vanity and her love of display, was in the seventh heaven; while Mark looked

back to his prosy life at Hallingham, and wondered how he had endured it. He wondered how any of the doctors, left there, endured it, and pitied them from his heart. The thousand a-year or so he once thought to enter upon as successor to Dr. Davenal, was recollected with contempt now.

This much must be said for the Great Wheal Bang Company — that its projectors were at least honest in their belief of its genuineness. In that, they differed from some other companies we have heard of, which have turned out to be nothing but a swindle — if you will excuse the word — from the earliest commencement, the very first dawning dream of their projectors. Mr. Barker was of that strangely sanguine nature which sees a fortune in the wildest scheme, and plunges head and heart and creed into the most improbable speculation: Mark, an utter tyro in mines, and all that concerns them, including companies, saw only with Barker's eyes. When Mr. Barker assured the entranced shareholders that one hundred pounds put into the Great Wheal Bang would multiply tenfold and tenfold, he spoke only the sanguine belief of his heart. When Mark Cray declared to his brother Oswald that a thousand pounds embarked in it by him would make him a rich man for life, he asserted the honest truth according to his conviction. No wonder the two gentlemen-promoters were eloquent.

Mark had made several visits to the scene of the mines, and he came back each time with (if possible) renewed assurance of the brilliant future; with increased ardour. Had the Chancellor of the Exchequer obligingly made Mark an impromptu present of a hundred thousand pounds, Mark would have flung it broadcast into the mine, did the mine thirst for it. He did not understand these things in the least; and the perpetual bustle going on, the number of the miners, even the very money paid in wages and such like expenses, were to Mark only an earnest of the rich returns that were to come

hereafter. Mark would go back to London in a glowing state, and send his friends the shareholders into a fever, longing to realise the prosperity that seemed so close at hand. The weekly reports overshadowed other weekly reports with envy, and created a *furore* in the speculating world. Some of the shareholders who understood mines, or thought they did, better than Mark, went down to the Principality, and examined into the state of things for themselves; they found them quite satisfactory, and came away as charmed as Mark. In point of fact, prospects did look well; the lead was of an unusually good quality, and there seemed no reason whatever to anticipate anything but success. Caroline had accompanied her husband once to the mines; but the stay there (putting prospects aside) did not please her: it was "rough," she told Mark, and it was very dull at the little inn; and she was glad to come away from it all ere the second day was over.

Perhaps the only person within the circle of Mark Cray's acquaintance not bitten by the Wheal Bang fever, was Miss Davenal. Even Oswald Cray was to succumb at last. He would not become a shareholder; he was too cautious a man to enter upon possible future liabilities, the extent of which no human being could foretell; but he did feel inclined to put a thousand pounds into Mark's hands, and tell him to do the best with it. It may almost be said that Oswald was worried into doing this. Mark would not let him rest. At the onset of the affair, when the glorious prospects of the Wheal Bang were first astonishing the world, Mark had urged Oswald to become one of them; a director, or at least a shareholder; but Oswald had turned a deaf ear. He felt greatly vexed at Mark's imprudence at abandoning Hallingham and his profession, leaving a certainty for an uncertainty; he felt more than vexed at the manner in which Mrs. Cray's money was

disposed of, so entirely opposed to the dying injunction of Dr. Davenal, so opposed (Oswald deemed) to all wisdom and prudence; and he set his face resolutely against the Wheal Bang. But Oswald was but mortal. As the weeks and months went on, and the mines became to all appearance valuable, the company flourishing, and Mark, in conjunction with others, dinned for ever into his ear the fortune he might make at it, Oswald began to waver. He had a thousand pounds laid by, and he felt half inclined to risk it; Mark over-persuaded him; and his visit to the Messrs. Knollys's office the day he encountered Sara Davenal, was for the purpose of making certain inquiries of those gentlemen relating to the Wheal Bang.

Not so with Miss Bettina Davenal. She set her face resolutely against the Great Wheal Bang from the first, and nothing turned her. She had never forgiven Mark and his wife for quitting Hallingham, and her reproaches to them could not cease. The apparent prosperity of the Great Wheal Bang changed not her opinion in the least. Mark asked her once whether she would take shares in it, and produced a Wheal Bang prospectus to point to its merits. She angrily replied that she would as soon throw her money into the Thames, that it would not be a surer way of getting rid of it, and rang the bell for Mark and his prospectus to be shown out of her house.

Mark Cray sat in the board room at the city offices of the Great Wheal Bang. A noble room, the cloth on its long table of the freshest green and the finest texture. Mark leaned his elbow upon this cloth as he talked and laughed with some of the friends of the Great Wheal Bang, who were getting rich so easily. It was not a board day; but visitors were numerous at all times.

"I had a line from him this morning," said Mark, con-

tinuing the conversation. "Spirits? I should think he does write in spirits! — what are you talking of? They are getting up quantities of ore now. It will soon be ready for the market."

"And its quality does not deteriorate?" asked Mark's immediate listener, a middle-aged gentleman with wise-looking spectacles on his nose.

"Deteriorate!" repeated Mark. "But you shall see the letter." He began to turn over the papers on the table, and the diamond ring on his little finger, a hundred guinea investment of his, began to show out the colours of a prism in its glittering brilliancy.

"It is of no consequence," returned the gentleman, when Mark could not readily find it. "I can take your word. When does Barker come up again?"

"To-day or to-morrow; I am not sure which. I should like you to have seen his letter, though it is but a line or two. The only motive for our fresh call upon the shareholders is to hasten the operations, and so speed the returns. With more capital afloat, we can increase the workers at the mine, and bring the ore out more quickly."

"It was to have been in the market by this."

"One cannot calculate to a day. It won't be long now; and its richness, when it does come, will astonish the world. Do just as you like: take the shares or leave them. This gentleman would not have had them to dispose of, but that he has urgent need of the money. He is over in Austria now, and has written to me: he is an old friend of mine."

"I'd not hesitate a moment to take them, were it my own money; I wish I had more to embark in it. But this is money belonging to my wards; and their relatives are so anxious that I should choose a safe investment, one in which there can be no risk."

Mark Cray rose from his seat. The word "risk" offended his pride, and he could only wonder that any one could be idiot enough to use it in connection with the Great Wheal Bang Mine. But Mark had no need to solicit now the taking of shares: half London was ready to snap them up: and he was too great a man to permit his time to be wasted unnecessarily.

"Consider over it, if you please, until to-morrow morning, Mr. Gilham," he said, as he moved away. "You can see the secretary if you come in before ten. After that, the shares will not be disposable."

There's no safer way to make a buyer eager, than for a seller to be indifferent; and Mr. Gilham and his spectacles went hastening after Mark, ready to close the bargain. But Mark was already the centre of an eager group, not to be got at again lightly. The next time Mr. Gilham caught sight of him, he was descending the wide staircase, surrounded as before by a crowd of attendant worshippers, who were unwilling to part with the great man, and his widely extending influence.

But great men must dine as well as small, and Mr. Cray was hastening home to that necessary meal. He extricated himself from his friends, and stepped into his cab that waited at the door: a favourite vehicle of Mark's, built under his own superintendence, in which he generally went to and fro morning and evening, driving his blood horse himself. Glancing at his watch as he dashed along Cheapside, he found it was considerably later than he had thought, and urged the horse to a quicker pace.

For Mr. and Mrs. Cray were expecting friends to dinner that evening. Dr. Ford of Hallingham and his two daughters were making a short stay in town, and had been invited by

Mark and his wife — neither of them loth to show off their new grandeur, and to send it to be talked about in Hallingham.

Suddenly Mark threw the horse nearly on his haunches, by the violence with which he pulled him up. Oswald Cray was on the pavement. He advanced to Mark at the latter's sign.

"Have you decided about the thousand pounds, Oswald?"

"Partially. I went down to Knollys's this morning, and they recommend the thing strongly. But I have worked hard for my money, Mark, and don't care to lose it."

"Lose it!" scornfully returned Mark. "The Great Wheal Bang won't be a *losing* concern. Look here, Oswald! I have but one motive in pressing the matter upon you: this mine of wealth has come flowing into my hands, and I do consider it a great pity that you, my only brother, should not reap some benefit from it. Others, strangers, are making their thousands and thousands — or will make them; and it's nothing but wilful blindness for you to let it slip through your fingers. It's obstinate folly, Oswald. Give me the thousand pounds, and I'll soon make you ten thousand."

"The fact is, Mark, I cannot feel so positively sure of its turning out well, as you do."

"Oswald, I tell you *that it will*. I and Barker have means of knowing facts, connected with the mine, that I don't speak of, even to you. As I assured you the other day, so I repeat it; your money cannot be lost. It is a perfectly sure and safe investment; I will answer for it with my life. Will you come home and dine with us?"

"I have dined."

"Dined!" echoed Mark, rather scornfully, for he was learning to despise any but the most fashionable hours — as many another newly-made great man has learnt before him.

"Come round in the evening, then, and see old Ford of Hallingham. Barker will be there, I expect, and we can talk this over further."

Mark Cray touched his horse, and the cab and its freight bounded off. Mark did not draw rein again until Grosvenor Place was reached.

CHAPTER IX.

A Slight Check.

THE house was blazing with light, every window bright with it. Mrs. Cray loved pomp and vanity in all their forms, and she generally caused her rooms to be lighted with the first glimmer of twilight. Mark Cray stepped into his handsome hall and was received by a couple of footmen. Flinging his hat to one, his gloves to another, he bounded up-stairs to his dressing-room, conscious that he was keeping the dinner and his guests waiting.

Did Mark Cray ever cast a sigh of regret to the simple life at Hallingham, when he and his wife used to sit down to mutton cutlets and a pudding, and think the fare good enough? Did *she* regret it at any odd moment? Not yet. Dress and dinners, with expense of other sorts, bring a fascination with them all too enthralling to the senses. How they pall upon the wearied spirit in time, how they deaden the heart and debase the intellect, let those answer who have become their slaves; but Mark Cray and his wife had not reached that period of weariness yet. You may be very sure, knowing what you do know of the world and the generality of people who populate it, that Mr. and Mrs. Cray wanted not for what is called society. The great projector of the Great Wheal Bang Company, holding in his own hands the power to make others rich, was not likely to lack adulation in his

private capacity any more than in his public one, and he and his wife drank their fill of it. Mark's mind was shallow, and his head tolerably empty, but he was sufficiently attractive in manners to win his way in society, even without the adjunct just mentioned. Mark was looked upon as of good connections also; for it had somehow got reported that he was a nephew of the proud Baronet of Thorndyke. Perhaps it may be forgiven to poor empty-headed Mark that he held his tongue from contradicting it, and suffered the world to think he was of the family of that great man. As to Caroline, people were in love with her beauty and her youth; and the costly extravagances of the house in Grosvenor Place bore their own charm. Altogether, more guests crowded the doors of Mr. and Mrs. Cray than the doors could always hold. Many satellites of the great world, of a position far above the real one of Mark Cray and his wife, flocked to pay them court; and neither of them was wise enough to see how unsuitable are extremes, or to discern that the acquaintance would never have been condescended to, but that Mark was the Great Wheal Bang's powerful chieftain. Therefore it was nothing unusual for Mark Cray to receive dinner guests at his board; on the contrary, it would have been a marked circumstance now, had he and his wife dined alone.

Mark washed his hands and hurried on his coat, and in a few minutes was at his dinner-table, his guests on either side of him. One guest at it, Mark could only regard with astonishment, and that was Miss Davenal. Not that Miss Davenal was not fitted to grace a dinner-table; no lady more so at her age in the three kingdoms; but she had so resolutely abstained from honouring Mark's house with her presence, that he had never expected to see her in it again. Caroline said she should invite her and Sara to meet their old friends the Fords, and Mark had laughed when he heard it. "She'll

never come," he said; "you might as well invite the lioness from the Zoological Gardens." However, here she was: she had chosen to come. She sat on Mark's left hand, her delicate features quite beautiful in their refinement; Miss Ford was on his right, a shrinking little woman of forty years; Miss Mary Ford and Sara Davenal were lower down; and the physician, a short, red-faced, shrivelled man, who talked incessantly and wore nankeen pantaloons, was next to Caroline. "Put a knife and fork for Mr. Barker," Mark had said to his servants: but Mr. Barker had not made his appearance yet. Those were all the guests.

There is something false about Caroline to-day. Look at her dress! It is white watered silk, gleaming with richness, as the dew-drops are gleaming in the white crape flowers in her hair; and it, the white silk, is elaborately trimmed with black ruchings and ribbons. That black, put on by her maid, taking the girl a whole afternoon to do it, has been added with a motive. Caroline, in her evening dress, has long put off the mourning for her good uncle, her more than father, dead though he has been but four months yet; but she is to-day a little ashamed of her haste, and she has assumed these black ribbons before these Hallingham friends and her Aunt Bettina, to make believe that she still wears it. Her violet eyes are intensely bright, and her cheeks glow with their sweetest and softest carmine. Sara wears a black crape robe, a little edging of white net only on its low body and sleeves, and she wears no ornament, except the jet beads on her neck and arms. The two Miss Fords are in copper-coloured silks made high: when they saw Mrs. Cray's white silk, fit for the court of our gracious Queen, they felt uncomfortable, and attempted a sort of apology that they had brought no evening dress with to them town.

And the dinner is in accordance with Caroline's attire.

Soup, and fish, and *entrées*, and roasts, and jellies, and sweets, and fal-lals; and more sorts of wine than the Miss Fords, simple and plain, could remember afterwards to count; and flowers, and plate, and servants in abundance: and grandeur enough altogether for the dining-room of England's Premier.

It was this state, this show, this expense, that so offended the good sense (very good always, though sometimes over severe) of Miss Bettina Davenal, and kept her aloof from Mr. and Mrs. Cray's house. If Mark really was making the vast amount of money (but it would have taken a wiser tongue than Mark's to convince her that that usually assumed fact was not a fallacy), then they ought to be putting it by, she argued; if they were not making it, if all this was but specious wealth, soon to pass away and leave only ashes and ruin behind it, then Mark and Caroline were fit only for a lunatic asylum. In any point of view, the luxurious appointments of the dinner she saw before her were entirely out of place for middle-class life: and Miss Bettina felt an irrepressible prevision that their folly would come home to them.

But she knew better than to mar the meeting with any unpleasant reproaches or forebodings then, and she was as cordial and chatty as her deafness allowed. It was a real pleasure to meet Hallingham friends, and Miss Bettina enjoyed herself more than she had ever done since the doctor's death.

The entertainment came to an end, and Caroline marshalled her guests to the glittering drawing-room: glittering with its mirrors, its chandeliers, and the many lights from its gilded girandoles. Dr. Ford and Mark followed shortly, and found them drinking coffee. Caroline and Sara were stealing a minute's private chat together: they had lived apart of late.

"How *did* you get my aunt to come?" Caroline was asking. "We thought she never intended to honour us here."

"She came of her own accord. I did not say a word to press it. I have been so vexed this afternoon, Caroline," resumed Sara, turning to a different subject. "My aunt has told me finally that she will not have Dick and Leo up for their holidays."

Caroline shrugged her pretty shoulders: very much as if Dick and Leo and their holidays were perfectly indifferent to her. "I don't think I should, in Aunt Bettina's place. Boys are dreadfully troublesome animals; and now that — that poor Uncle Richard is not here to keep them in order —" another shrug finished the sentence.

"Oh, but that is one reason why I so wish them to come," said Sara, her voice somewhat tremulous. "I don't expect that they can be had always; that would be unreasonable; but to stay at school just this first time after poor papa's death! — it will seem so hard to them. Caroline, could *you* not have them?"

"*I!*" returned Caroline, amazed at the proposition.

"You have a large house and plenty of servants. It would be an act of real kindness."

"Good gracious, Sara! I'd not have them; I'd not be worried with those two boys for six weeks, if you paid me in gold and diamonds. They — who's this?"

The door had opened, and one of the servants was waiting to make an announcement:

"Mr. Oswald Cray."

Caroline ran to meet him. He looked rather surprised at her attire, and began apologising in a laughing sort of way for his own morning coat. He had expected to meet only Barker

and Dr. Ford. A greeting to the Hallingham people, and he went up and held out his hand to Miss Davenal.

"You are a great stranger, Mr. Oswald Cray. I did not suppose that the formal call you made upon me when I settled in town three months ago was to be your only one."

"I am a sadly busy man," was his answer. "Offending I fear some of my best friends through not visiting them. But I can scarcely dare to call my time my own."

"Out of town, do you say? Well, that is an excuse of course. Sara, here's Mr. Oswald Cray: you used to know him in Hallingham."

The blushes tingled on her cheek as Mr. Oswald Cray touched her hand. Tingled at the thought that it was not the first time they had met that day.

"What have you been doing with yourself, Oswald, since I saw you before dinner?" called out Mark, who was pointing out the beauty of the paintings on his walls to the Miss Fords.

"I have been to Pimlico since then."

"To Pimlico! Oh, I know: to that friend of yours; Allister. It strikes me you go there pretty often."

"As often as I can spare time for," returned Oswald.

Mark laughed. Had he possessed that refined regard for the feelings of others, never wanting in the true gentleman, he had not so spoken. "*I* know. But you need not be so close over it, Oswald. That Miss Allister is a nice girl, is she not?"

"Very," was the emphatic reply.

"One to be esteemed. Eh?"

"As few can be esteemed by me."

Oswald spoke in his coldest, most uncompromising tone: his haughty face turned almost defiantly on Mark. He was the last man to brook this sort of speech, and in that moment

he despised Mark. Sara had a book in her hand, and she never raised her drooping eyelids from it. What was it to her now whom he esteemed? But she *heard*: all too plainly.

There was a pause of silence; rather an unpleasant one. It was broken by Miss Mary Ford.

"I must not forget to ask after your old servant Watton, Miss Davenal. Does she like her place? I suppose you see her occasionally."

"Thank you, I don't like it at all," returned Miss Davenal, hearing wrongly, as usual. "What was Mark asking you, Mr. Oswald Cray?"

"Watton is quite well; I saw her this morning," interposed Sara, who perhaps did not care that Mark's choice of subject should again be brought forward. Mrs. Cray caught up the words.

"Saw Watton this morning, Sara! Where did you see her?"

And the very moment the unlucky admission had left Sara's lips, she knew how thoughtless it was to have made it, and what an undesirable discussion it might involve.

"Where did you see Watton?" repeated Mrs. Cray.

"I had a little business that way, and called upon her," replied Sara. She was obliged to speak: there was no help for it; and all the room seemed to be listening to her answer, which she had not time to weigh.

"Business down that way!" echoed Caroline. "Why, it is in the City! What business could you have there?"

"Not much: nothing of moment to you, Caroline;" and Sara, in her dismay and fear, turned and began talking rapidly to old Dr. Ford.

"Aunt Bettina," called out Mrs. Cray, in a slow distinct voice, "what business took Sara to the City this morning? I thought only gentlemen went there."

Aunt Bettina heard, and lifted her hand in momentary petulance, as if the subject angered her.

"You must not ask me. Sara has her own secrets, and goes her own ways since your uncle's death. I am not allowed to know them."

Sara looked up to reply, perhaps to defend herself; but she remembered what was at stake, and forced herself to silence. Better that the blame should lie upon her! She had caught a momentary glimpse of Mr. Oswald Cray: he was leaning against a table in the distance, his eyes fixed upon her, reading every change in her countenance; his own face stern and impassive.

What more would have been said or asked was interrupted by the entrance of another guest. A middle-sized man of thirty, with reddish hair and whiskers, a free manner and voluble tongue. Mark started forward with a shout of welcome, and introduced him to the strangers. It was Mr. Barker.

"I have brought up the grandest news, Cray," he exclaimed, in a state of excitement. "There's another lode found."

"No!" echoed Mark, his eyes sparkling. "Another lode?"

"Dutton came upon it yesterday afternoon after I wrote those few lines to you. By Jove, gentlemen" — throwing his looks round the room — "I am afraid to calculate what will be the riches of this mine! Mark, old fellow, I hope our success won't drive us into Bedlam — as the case has been with some millionaires."

Miss Bettina, who had contrived to hear, cleared her throat. "It's a great deal more likely to drive you into the union, sir."

It was so unexpected a check to Mr. Barker's enthusiasm

that he could only stare in amazement at Miss Bettina. He had not met her before. "Never mind her," said Mark, in an undertone, "it's only old Bett. And she's as deaf as a post."

But Mr. Barker did mind. "Why, ma'am," said he, going close to her, "what do you mean?"

"I can't forget a good old proverb that I learnt in my young days, sir," was her answer: "one that I have seen exemplified times upon times in my course through life. 'He that would be rich in twelve months, is generally a beggar in six.' I know what good newly discovered mines are apt to bring, sir, however promising they may look."

Mr. Barker fairly turned his back upon her; he believed she must be little better than a lunatic; and gave his attention to Mark and the more sensible portion of the company.

"The people are up in arms down about there," he said. "Lots of them who wrote for shares in the new allotment have not succeeded in getting any, and I thought they'd have torn me to pieces. I can't help it. It's a clear impossibility that the whole world can go in for being rich. If luck falls on one, it doesn't fall on another."

Dr. Ford, to whom Mr. Barker had seemed to appeal, nodded his head. "I hear great things of this mine, sir," said he.

"Great things!" repeated Mr. Barker, as if the words were not sufficiently expressive. "It is the very grandest thing that England has seen for many a day. The golden wealth of the Spanish Main is poor, compared to it."

"I'm sure I hope it will answer."

"You — hope — it — will — answer!" echoed Mr. Barker, his red face going rather purple. "Why, sir, it *has* answered. It is answering. I could take my interest in it into the money

market to-morrow, and sell it for half a million of money. Answer!"

Oswald Cray came nearer. "When shall you begin to realise?" he inquired.

"In about six weeks from this."

"Six weeks! Really to realise?"

"We might get some loads off before, if we chose, but we don't care to begin until the sales can go on uninterruptedly. The lead is coming up beautifully; vast quantities of it. You never saw such lead. It bangs all other in the locality into fits."

Mr. Barker in his joyous excitement was scarcely choice in his mode of speech. He was not particularly so at any time. He rubbed his hands — which looked as red as if they had been digging for ore — one against another.

"A fellow came up to the place — Lord What's-his-name's agent, and began handling the specimens. 'What sort of ore d'ye call this?' he asked. 'The best that ever was dug,' some of our men answered him. 'And so it is,' said he: 'we can't get such as this out of our pit.' No more they can: not an owner of 'em in all Wales."

"But you will not be selling freely in six weeks," returned Oswald. "It is impossible."

"Impossible, is it?" retorted Mr. Barker. "It would be in most cases, I grant you; it's not in ours. You go and look at the thousands of men on the works. The Great Chwddyn mine doesn't deal in impossibilities."

"Would you be so good as tell me what you call that word, sir?" asked the physician, putting his hand to his ear. "We can't get at the pronunciation of it at Hallingham."

"And we can't here," returned easy Mr. Barker. "One calls it one thing and one another. As to trying to speak it like the natives, nobody can. We call it the Great Wheal

Bang up here. Not that it's at all appropriate or correct to do so, but one can't be breaking one's teeth over the other. You see — Holloa! what's this? For me?"

One of Mark's servants had entered with a telegraphic dispatch. It was addressed to Mr. Barker.

"Your man has brought it round from Piccadilly, sir. He thought it might be of moment."

"Let's see. Where's it from? — Wales? Ay. Another lode discovered, I'll be bound!"

Mr. Barker carried the paper across the room, and opened it under the lights of a girandole. He stared at it more than read it; stared at the words as if unable to understand them: and a curious expression of puzzled bewilderment, half wonder, half dismay, struggled to his face. Mark Cray had come to his side, all eagerness; and Oswald was watching them from the distance.

"Is it another lode, Barker?"

"Hush! There has been a slight irruption of water," whispered Barker, thrusting the paper into his pocket. "Good heavens! that would floor us at once."

Mark Cray's mouth dropped. He stared as helplessly at Mr. Barker as the latter had stared at the dispatch. The sight of his face awoke Mr. Barker's caution.

"For goodness' sake, Cray, don't look like that! They'll see you, and suspect something. *This* must be kept dark, if possible. I daresay it's nothing. I'll go back again to-night."

He turned away with a beaming face to the company, laughing merrily, talking gaily. They might have well deemed that two fresh lodes had been discovered instead of one. Mark, not quite so quick in recovering his equanimity, stayed where he was before the girandole, looking in it in an absent sort of manner, and pushing his hair back mechani-

cally. Perhaps this was the first time that even the *possibility* of failure had come close to Mark, face to face.

Barker was the first of the guests to retire, and Mark left the room with him. As the latter was returning to it he met his brother, who was also departing.

"Not going yet, Oswald! What a one you are! — Afraid of being in the streets late, it's my belief. I say! when am I to have the thousand pounds?"

"My mind is not quite made up yet," was the answer, a rather unexpected one to Mark's ears. "Mark, did Barker get any bad news to-night?"

"Bad news!" repeated Mark, as if quite at a loss to know what could be meant.

"By that dispatch from Wales?"

"Not at all," returned Mr. Mark, volubly. "He had forgotten to leave some instructions behind him, so they telegraphed. What put your head upon bad news?"

"Barker's countenance as he read the dispatch. And yours also when you joined him. You both looked as though some great calamity had occurred."

Mark laughed blithely. "Oswald, old fellow, you were always inclined to be fanciful. The mine is a glorious mine, and you'll be a blind booby if you don't secure some benefit in it. I'll answer for the safety of the investment with — with — my life," concluded Mark, speaking rather strongly in his loss for a smile. "Can't you rely upon me?"

Oh, Mark Cray! His protestations of the "safety" were excusable before, when he believed what he said: but they were not now. Since that ominous message arrived, his very heart had been quaking within him. In the few confidential words he had just exchanged with Barker on going out, the latter had said: "We must get all the money we can, for we shall want it. Water, no matter how slight the irruption,

plays the very deuce with the costs of a mine." And Mark Cray, to avert, or help to avert, or to conceal the calamity, was quite ready to sacrifice his own good faith and the money of his brother.

CHAPTER X.

In the Temple Gardens.

You have heard and read of those false promises that keep faith to the eye and break it to the spirit, bringing a flood-tide of anguish in their train. As such, may be described the realisation of the long-deferred hope — the money — so anxiously expected by Sara Davenal. It came in due course, after a little more waiting; that is, the order to receive it was sent to her: but it did not bring pleasure with it. For the sales had not realised so much as was anticipated. Do they ever realise as much? Dr. Davenal had expected there would be about three thousand pounds: five hundred over and above the sum owing. But the money fell short by two hundred pounds even of this sum: and there was not enough to pay Mr. Alfred King.

Oh, it was a great burthen to be thrown upon this girl, in her early years, in her solitary loneliness! When the news came, and the small sum of money stared her in the face in figures all black and white, she looked around her and in despondency. She felt that she had no friend, save God.

Feeling half-hopeless, Sara sat down and considered what was to be done. Two thousand three hundred pounds certainly were not two thousand five hundred, and she had little expectation that Mr. Alfred King would be satisfied with it. An ordinary creditor, whose debt was a legitimate one, would of course not remit two hundred pounds: but this debt was different, for she had every reason to believe it was no

legitimate debt, but money paid to purchase silence. Then, a voice whispered her, they would be all the less likely to remit it; they would hold out for it to the last farthing. *Whose* silence she could not tell. But for the mysterious hint of Mr. Alfred King that others were interested in this business, she might have thought it was his alone. The disagreeable impression left upon her mind by that interview had not in the least worn away: she greatly disliked Mr. Alfred King; she very greatly disliked the thought of visiting him again.

"Mark must help me," she said. "He is rolling in wealth, and two hundred pounds will not be much to him. It will be my own money. His covenant with my dear papa was to pay me three hundred pounds yearly for five years, and he has not begun the payment yet."

Quite true! Mr. Mark Cray had not yet handed over a shilling of the covenant money. Miss Davenal had pressed for some of it at the time of Mark's quitting Hallingham, but Mark had declined. She had brought it under his notice since; and Mark had made excuses still. He was not bound to pay it until the expiry of the year subsequent to Dr. Davenal's death, he said; and it would be most convenient to him to pay it then. Too proud to press the matter further for her niece, Miss Davenal contented herself with a dignified silence: but she did wonder whether it was that Mark would not or could not pay it. If he could not, why then how hollow, how false was all the show and luxury they had entered on in Grosvenor Place! The real truth of the matter was, Mark's expenses of one kind or another were so great, that he had no ready money to spare; on the contrary, he was often at positive fault for some. And Mark was not a willing paymaster at the best of times: these careless, spendthrift men frequently are not.

Yet the Great Wheal Bang was flourishing: how flourishing, its elated shareholders could tell you; and Oswald Cray, relying on the assurances of his brother, had embarked his thousand in it. That alarming dispatch, with its still more alarming news, had turned out to be more smoke than fire; and when Mr. Barker reached the mine, whither he had hurried with all speed, he found the danger over. There had been an irruption of water, but a very slight one; it did not transpire beyond the locality: and Barker and Mark kept the secret well from the shareholders.

Sara went to Mark. She told him, speaking very gravely, that she had urgent need of two hundred pounds, to complete some arrangements of necessity, left in her charge by her father. Mark's answer was, that he could not help her then; that it was not in his power. Perhaps he could not. They had not yet begun to realise, for that untoward accident, slight as it was, had served to retard the works, and there was no lead yet in the market. A short while, Mark said, and she might come to him for two thousand, and welcome, if it would be of any service to her. Large promises! But Mark had always dealt in such.

Sara had nowhere else to turn to for money in the wide world. Her aunt she knew could not help her; Miss Davenal's income was of a certain extent only, and their living absorbed it. So she wrote to Mr. Alfred King, and he appointed a day to meet her in Essex Street.

Once more, once more, she had to go forth to the unpleasant interview. All was unpleasant connected with it; the object, the journey, the very house, and Mr. Alfred King himself: but she was obeying the command of her dead father, she was seeking to save the reputation, perhaps the life, of her living brother; and Sara Davenal was not one

to shrink on her own account from responsibilities such as these.

But surely the spirit of mischief was in it all! It seemed like an evil fate upon her — at least, so she thought in her vexation. For on this day, as on the other, she encountered Mr. Oswald Cray.

Not at the offices, but at the gate of the Temple Garden. It occurred in this way. As before, she found she had to wait a considerable time before she could see Alfred King, and she wandered into the quiet courts of the Temple, and came to the larger Garden.

The gate-keeper would not admit her to it at first; she had not the *entrée*, he said; but she told him her case: that she was a stranger, and had to wait an hour and a half to keep an appointment at a solicitor's in Essex Street. Her sweet face and her plaintive tone — for the voice catches the mind's sorrow — won him over, and, though he grumbled a little, he let her enter. It was peaceful there; shut in from the world's turmoil: the grass was green, and the paths were smooth; and Sara sat on the bench alone, and watched the river steamers as they passed and repassed on the Thames.

It was in leaving the gardens that she encountered Mr. Oswald Cray. He had business that day with a barrister in chambers, and was passing the gate as she was leaving it. Sara shrunk within the gate again, in the hope that he might not accost her.

It was a vain hope. Surprised to see her there so far from home and alone, he inquired the reason in the moment's impulse. The crimson blush, called into her face at the meeting, faded to paleness as she answered: "An appointment," she could not say she was there for pleasure.

And, besides: that utter weariness of spirit, when we no longer struggle against fate, had grown to be hers. It

seemed of little moment whether he knew her errand that day or not: a faintness of heart, not unlike despair, was weakening her energies.

"An appointment?" he repeated. "Not at the place where I saw you before? Not with Mr. Alfred King?"

"Yes, that is where I am going," she replied, feeling she could not battle against the questions. "I was to have seen Mr. Alfred King at twelve; but I was late, and so I have to wait for him."

"But it is not expedient that you should go there," said Oswald.

"I must go there," she answered, all too energetically in her desperation. "Were the interview to lead to — to my death, and I knew that it would, I should go."

The words, so unlike *her* calm good sense; the tone, so full of hopeless sorrow, told Oswald how full of grief must be the heart they came from. They had strolled, unconsciously perhaps, down the broad walk of the garden, and were now passing a bench. "Will you sit down for a minute," he asked, "while I say a few words to you?"

"Yes: if I have time. My appointment is for two o'clock, and I wish to be there rather before than after it."

He took out his watch, and showed it to her. There was plenty of time to spare.

"Have you to keep these appointments often?"

"I never kept but the one you know of. I hope — I am not sure — but I hope that the one to-day will be all I shall have to keep. It is a singular chance — that you should meet me on both days!"

"I don't think anything in the world happens by chance," gravely observed Oswald. "Do you recollect the interview I had with you at your house, just after your father's death?" he resumed, after a pause.

Sara turned her face to him in her surprise, "Oh yes."

"And do you remember," he continued, his voice assuming its sincerest and tenderest tone, "what I said at that interview?—That nothing would give me so much pleasure as to be your *friend*, should you require one. Sara — forgive me if I go back for a moment to our old familiar forms of speech — let me prove myself one now!"

"In what manner?" she asked, after some moments of hesitation.

"If I am able to understand anything of this business, you need one. You seem to stand alone in it; no one to counsel you, no one to help."

"It is true," she said, "I have to stand in it alone. I must stand in it alone."

"Suffer *me* to be, so far, your friend."

She faintly shook her head. "You could not be."

"It is true that — that — the period has not arrived, perhaps for either of us, when we had contemplated such a friendship might begin. But we must waive that: necessity alters cases. Sara, let me serve you! I ask it in the name of Dr. Davenal. Surely you can have no objection?"

Her eyes were swimming in tears as she looked straight before her on the gravel path. "In anything but this, I should only be too thankful. Sometimes I feel that I am left without a friend in the wide world."

"Why not in this?"

"Because it is a matter that I may not confide to any one. It is" — she lowered her voice — "a secret."

"I will be true as steel. No matter what dishonour may be in it, it shall be held sacred within my breast; never betrayed, never spoken of. I judge that it is not a pleasant secret; therefore I use the word, dishonour. It is more fitting that I should be engaged in this matter than you."

For a single moment the temptation came over her to tell him what it was: just as the temptation to tell him the secret connected with Lady Oswald's death had once momentarily assailed Dr. Davenal. But it passed away almost with the thought. She could not speak of her brother's fault; she *could not*. Neither might she delegate to another the last directions left to her by her father. Safely grasped in her hand, she held those sealed papers left by Dr. Davenal; how could she transfer them even to Oswald Cray!

"I wish I could tell it you!" she said in a tone of pain. "But I cannot; it is not possible. You will have guessed that this is not my own secret. It is a charge that was left to me by my dear father when he was dying: and I am obliged to fulfil it. He had no one to leave it to but me."

"Your brother being away. I can understand so much. Suffer me to stand to you, in this, in your brother's place. I am sure Captain Davenal would wish it."

The faint colour of dread came into her cheeks as she thought how far he would be from wishing this discussed with Mr. Oswald Cray. "I can't tell it," she murmured.

Oswald turned his gaze upon her, his dark blue eyes never more earnest, more eager.

"Will you let me urge this according to the dictates of common sense? Is it fit that you, being what you are, a lady, — young, refined, inexperienced, — should be dancing attendance at Jones and Green's offices; men who do not bear too good a reputation in the legal world, to meet principally Mr. Alfred King, a man who bears a worse?"

The crimson shone in her cheeks. Put in this way it was anything but pleasant to the refinement of which he spoke. "I know, I know," she said impulsively. "I felt terribly the going there the day you saw me; I feel it again now. But indeed I cannot help myself. It was a solemn charge left me

by my father, and in going through with it I am but doing my duty. God is over me," she simply added. "I have had a great deal to try me, a great deal to bear: but I am striving to do right under Him."

Her lip quivered as she spoke, and she paused from emotion. It was too much for the stoic philosophy of Oswald Cray. All the old feelings pent up so long, buried only, not subdued, resumed their sway with uncontrollable force, like a torrent let loose down a mountain's side. He caught her hands in his; he bent his face near to hers, its whole expression one of the deepest love; his persuasive voice, trembling with agitation, was sunk to the softest whisper.

"Sara, my dearest, I still love you better than anything on earth. Heaven knows how I have striven to forget you since that cloud fell upon us. It has been of no use. Bereft of you, life is but one long dreary path, growing more cruelly monotonous day by day."

Her heart beat wildly, and for one brief interval a hope, sweeter than any earthly dream, stole into it like a golden ray of sunshine. Only for an instant: she knew that it was but so much deceit, for him as for her.

"Are there no means by which we may forget that cloud, and return to the past?" he resumed; his voice hoarse with its emotion, and so low in tone that she could scarcely hear it. "Better to sacrifice a little prejudice, than to pass a whole life in dissatisfied pain. Let the dishonour — pardon me for thus alluding to it — rest with the dead: perhaps it has been wrong from the first to make it our sorrow."

She looked at him, not quite understanding. He saw the doubt.

"Be my wife, Sara. I can then take these troubles upon me as my legal right. On my sacred word of honour, I will never cast a reproach to the past, so much as in thought. No!

I will not let your hands go until you tell me by word of mouth what I *know* — that your heart is mine still; that we *cannot* be faithless one to the other."

She felt faint with the moment's pain. The dewdrops of emotion were gathering on her face, and he would not loose her hands that she might wipe them away.

"If we never were true to each other, let us be so now," he went on. "It is too solemn a moment for equivocation: it is no time for us to pretend ignorance of our mutual love."

It was indeed no time for equivocation, or for doubt. Sara rose superior to it. A reticence that might have been observed at another time was forgotten now in her emotion and pain.

"I have not been faithless: perhaps I never shall be. But we can never be more to each other than we are now. The dishonour clings to me, and always will cling."

"Sara! don't I say that I will forget it?"

"No; I would never bring the possibility of — of — I think you do not understand," she broke off, lifting her white face to his. "It was not only dishonour."

"What else?"

"Crime."

A change passed over his countenance as he raised his head, which had been bent to catch the word. Soon it brightened again. Never perhaps had his besetting sin been so quiescent: but pride, even such pride as Oswald Cray's, is a less strong passion than love.

"It was not *your* crime, Sara. And it has passed away."

"It has not passed."

"Not passed!"

"Not yet. There's danger still."

Oswald bit his lip. "Danger of what?"

"Of — of — exposure," she faintly said. "Do not force

me to say more. Only believe one thing — that I can never be your wife. Do you think if there were no insuperable barrier, that *I* should make one?" she added, her face flushing a hot crimson. "Forgive me: I scarcely know what I say: but you wished that we should speak without reserve."

"Sara, let me fully understand. Do you imply that there exists any good and substantial reason *still*, call it insuperable barrier if you will, why you ought not to become my wife? Wait a moment. Before you give an answer, remember that to my heart it is fraught with either life or death."

"I do not imply it; I fully state it. Oh, don't visit it upon me!" she exclaimed, as his face seemed to be assuming its old haughtiness. "It is not my fault. I did not work the disgrace."

"No," he answered soothingly, "it is not your fault. Forgive me," he softly whispered. "The blow to me is heavy."

"It may pass for you. It will pass. You will form new friendships, new ties, and forget the old. Better that it should be so."

"But never a new love! Never one who will be to me what the other has been."

She rose from her seat. Oswald drew her down on it again.

"As I hinted just now, Sara, the time when we may mix freely as friends has not yet come; it would not do for either of us. But I must make a last appeal to you — suffer me to be your friend, in this one strait. Is it not *possible* that I can act for you?"

"It is not possible. There are certain reasons why neither you nor anybody else can do this: and, putting these aside, there is the weighty one that it was the charge bequeathed to

me, and to me alone, by my dying father. Thank you for all," she whispered, as she suddenly rose and held out her hand, her soft dark eyes speaking their thanks to his.

He rose also. He did not release her hand, but placed it within his arm to lead her up the solitary path. If those grave, middle-aged counsel, deep in their briefs behind the dusty windows opposite, had glanced out at the interview, it probably reminded them of their own sweet spring-time.

Sara withdrew her hand at the garden-gate, but he walked by her side through the courts to Essex Street. She halted there to say adieu.

"I suppose I must not ask to accompany you!"

She shook her head. "I must be alone."

"Fare you well, then," he said. "May all good angels guard you."

Mr. Alfred King was waiting for her. He was evidently not pleased at two hundred pounds of the sum being missing: but he turned it off upon the "other parties." They would not accept it, he said, unless paid in full; and he hinted at consequences to Captain Davenal. He would not sign the receipt: told Sara it was useless to unseal it: but he did write a receipt for the present cheque paid. Altogether, it was a less satisfactory interview than even the former one had been: and Sara quitted him with a sinking heart. She had not the remotest idea where to get the money; and a despairing foreboding was upon her that Edward must yet pay the sacrifice of his crime.

"How long will they wait?" she asked herself as she went shivering up Essex Street. "Suppose they send me word that they will not wait? — that Edward — oh, if I had but the means to —"

"Well? Is the thing happily over? You said this might be the last interview."

It was Oswald Cray. He had waited for her. Her mind was pre-occupied with its fears, almost bewildered, and she scarcely knew what she answered.

"No! it is not happily over. It is all unhappy, and I am frightened. The money I took them was — was" — she broke off with a start. Recollection had come to her.

"Was what?" he asked.

"I think I forgot myself," she murmured, as a burning flush dyed her face. "My mind is full of trouble. Pray pardon me, Mr. Oswald Cray."

CHAPTER XI.

An Irruption on Mark Cray.

If anything could exceed the prosperity of the Great Wheal Bang Mine itself, it was the prosperity of those immediately connected with it. There was only one little drawback — ready money ran short. It had been short a long while, and the inconvenience was great in consequence; but the prolonged inconvenience was now approaching to such a height that even that sanguine spirit, Barker, even Mark Cray in his confiding carelessness, felt that something must be done to remedy it.

Of course the cause of this will be readily divined — that the Great Wheal Bang's ore was not yet in the market. The heat of summer had passed, September was in with its soft air and its cool breezes, and still that valuable ore had not begun to "realise." It was obstinate ore, and it persisted in giving the greatest possible trouble before it would come out of its mother earth, where it had been imbedded for ages and ages. Those who understood the matter best, and the process of working these mines, tedious at all times, did not consider that any time was being lost; and it is more than probable

that the impatience of Barker and Mark Cray alone caused the delay to appear unduly long.

The money swallowed up by that mine was enormous, and Mark Cray got half dismayed at odd moments. The shareholders were growing tired of the calls upon their pockets; yet they were on the whole confiding shareholders, believing implicitly in the mine and its final results. As a natural sequence, the mine's wants being so great, its mouth so greedy a one, Mark Cray and his friend could have the less money to play with on their own score: still they managed to secure a little for absolute personal wants, and tradespeople of all denominations were eager to supply anything and everything to the great men of the Great Wheal Bang. How entire was the confidence placed in the mine by these two masters of it, may be seen from the fact of their depriving themselves of money to pour it into the ever-open chasm. They might so easily have diverted a little channel into their own pockets! True, it might not have been quite the honest thing to do, but in these matters few men are scrupulous. Mark had surreptitiously sent a few shares into the market and realised the proceeds; but he had done it with reluctance: he did not care to part with his shares; neither was it well that the Great Wheal Bang's shares should be afloat.

Standing at the window of their drawing-room on this balmy September afternoon, were Mark Cray and his wife. The fashionable world were of course not in London, but Mr. and Mrs. Cray formed an exception — there is no rule without one, you know. Mark felt that he could not be absent from those attractive offices in the City, even for a day. It was well that one of them should be seen there, and Barker was everlastingly running down into Wales. "Never mind, Carine," he said to his wife. "We'll take it out next year: we'll have a three-months' autumn trip in Germany. The money will be

rolling in upon us then, and I need not stick here to keep the shareholders in good humour, as I have to do now." Carine obediently acquiesced; and she did it with cheerfulness: she had not been sufficiently long in her new and luxurious home to care about leaving it.

But she solaced herself with all the gaiety that was obtainable within reach. Drives out of town by day, and the theatre at night, or some other amusement accessible in September. On this day they had been to a wedding at the house of some new friends at Richmond; and they had but now returned. If you look out you may see the fine carriage with its four grey horses just turning from the door, for Caroline, capricious Caroline, wayward and whimsical as a child, had stepped out of it undecided whether to go out again and drive in the Park before dinner. So she kept the carriage waiting until she was pleased to decide not to go.

"I am a little tired, Mark, and they'd be ever so long taking out those post-horses and putting in our own," she said to her husband. "We could never go in the Park with four horses, and postboys wearing white favours. Empty as the drive is, we should have a crowd round us."

"Taking you for the bride; and a very pretty one!" returned Mark, gallantly.

Caroline laughed; a little all-conscious laugh of vanity. She laid her beautiful bonnet of real lace and marabouts — and for which the milliner would assuredly charge £10 — on a side-table, and threw off her costly white lace mantle. The folds of her silk dress, its colour the delicate bloom of the spring lilac, rustled as she went back to the window.

"Only think, Mark, we have been married nearly a year! It will be a year next month."

Mark stood with his face close to the window. He was looking at the trees in the Green Park, their leaves playing

in the golden light of the setting sun. Caroline flirted a few drops on her handkerchief from the miniature essence-bottle dangling from her wrist, and raised it to her carmine cheeks. The day's excitement had brought to them that rich bloom so suspiciously beautiful.

"I declare there's Barker!" exclaimed Mark. "I thought he'd be in."

Mr. Barker was dashing up the street in a cab, as fast as the horse's legs would go. He had been at the offices all day, doing duty for Mark. He saw them at the window, and gave them a nod as he leaped out. Mark looked at his watch and found it wanted yet some time to dinner. They sat down now, all three together, leaving the window to take care of itself. There was always so much to say when Barker was there. He talked so fast and so untiringly; present doings and future prospects were so good; and Caroline was as much at home in it as they were. They had had a splendid day in the City, Barker said volubly, except for grumbling. A hundred, or so, groaning old disappointed fellows had been in, who wanted to embark in the Wheal Bang and make their fortunes, but there were no shares to be had for love or money, and they were fit to bite their fingers off. Altogether, nothing could be more smooth, more delightful than affairs, and Barker had received news from the mines that morning, promising loads upon loads of ore in a month or so's time.

Mark rubbed his hands. "I say, Barker, what do you say to a quiet little dinner at Blackwall to-morrow?" cried he. "I and Carine are thinking of driving down. Will you come?"

"Don't mind if I do," returned Barker. "What time?"

"Well, not very late. The evenings are not so light as they were. Suppose we say" ——

Before the hour had left Mark's lips, he was stopped by a

commotion. A sound as of much talking and bumping of boxes in the hall below: of boxes that appeared to be coming into the house. Caroline went to the window and saw a cab drawn up to the door, a last trunk being taken off it, and three bandboxes in a row on the pavement.

"Why, who can it be?" she exclaimed.

The question was soon set at rest. A lady in fashionable half-mourning entered the room and clasped Mark round the neck. Three young ladies entered after her and clasped Mark also, all three at once, two by the arms, one by the coat-tails. Mr. Barker's red whiskers stood out in wonder at the sight, and Caroline's violet eyes opened to their utmost width.

"We thought we'd take you by surprise, darling," the elder lady was saying. "The girls declared it would be delightful. I couldn't afford any change for them this year, Mark, out of my poor means, and we determined to pay you a visit for a few days. And so we have come, and I hope you can take us in."

"Yes, but don't smother me, all of you at once," was poor Mark's answer. "I am glad to see you, mother; and I am sure my wife — Caroline, you remember my mother and my sisters."

It was certainly an imposing number to take a house by storm, and there was vexation in Mark's eye as he looked deprecatingly at his wife. But Caroline rose superior to the emergency. She came forward prettily and gracefully, and welcomed them all with a cordial smile. Mrs. Cray the elder could not take her eyes from her face: she thought she had never seen one grown so lovely. She withdrew them at length and turned them on Mr. Barker.

But that gentleman scarcely needed an introduction. He was of that free and easy nature that makes itself at home

without one; and in an incredibly short time, before indeed the strangers had taken their bonnets off, he was chattering to them as familiarly as though he had known them for years. They were rather pleasing girls, these sisters of Mark — Fanny, Margaret, and Nina: very accomplished, very useless, and bearing about them the tone of good society.

Leaving Mark to welcome them, we must turn for an instant to the house of Miss Davenal. Sara was at rest, for she had paid Mr. Alfred King. In her desperate need — it surely might be called such! — she wrote the facts of the case to Mr. Wheatley. Not telling him the details, not saying a word that might not have been disclosed to the whole body of police themselves, but simply stating to him that she had very urgent need of this two hundred pounds for her father's sake. The result was that Mr. Wheatley sent her the money. But he was not a rich man, and he candidly told her he could not have done it but for the certainty there existed of its speedy return to him. Sara lost not a moment in seeking another and a final interview with Mr. Alfred King. The papers were given up to her, the receipt signed, all was done as specified by Dr. Davenal, and the affair and the danger to Edward were alike at an end. The horrible nightmare on Sara Davenal's days was lifted; the fear which had been making her old before her time was over. Her countenance lost its look of wearing pain, and she seemed like a child again in her freedom from care.

Yes, the dreadful nightmare was over, and Sara was at rest. In her immunity from pain, in her renewed happiness, it almost seemed as if the world might still have charms for her. You can look at her as she stands in the drawing-room by Miss Davenal's side. It is the same evening as the one spoken of above, when Mrs. Cray and her daughters made that irruption upon Mark. Sara is in evening dress — a black

gauze, with a little white net quilling on the low body and sleeves. Her white cloak lies on the sofa, and she is drawing on some new lavender gloves. But look at her face! at her cheek's rich colour! at the sweet smile on the lips, at the bright eye! Is it the anticipated evening's enjoyment that is calling these forth? No no; the pleasant signs spring from a heart at rest; a heart that had long been aching, worn, *terrified* with a secret care.

It was very rare indeed that Miss Davenal went out, but she had accepted an invitation for dinner that evening. She had a few friends in London, not new ones (of new ones she had made none); but old acquaintances of her earlier days. The friend she was going to this evening, Lady Reid, had been her schoolfellow at Hallingham; they had grown up together, and Bettina Davenal was her bridesmaid when she married young Lieutenant Reid, who had then his fortune to make. He made it out in India, and he came home a colonel and a K.C.B.; came home only to die, as is the case with too many who have spent their best days in the Indian empire. His widow lived at Brompton, and Miss Davenal and she liked nothing better than to spend an hour together and talk of the days when they were so young and hopeful. How different, how different to them was the world now! Could it be the same world? Many of you, my readers, have asked the very question.

Neal had gone to the livery stables to order round a carriage, for Miss Bettina had a horror of cabs, and had not put her foot inside one since the evening of her arrival in London. She stood in her rich black silk and her cap of that fine white lace called point d'Angleterre, glancing from the window and talking with Sara. They had had news from Bombay that afternoon from Edward. Great news! and perhaps Sara's cheeks owed some of their unusual colour to this.

Captain Davenal was married. He had fallen in love with a pretty girl in India, or she had fallen in love with him, and they were married. She was an only child, he wrote them word, and an heiress; her name Rose Reid, now Rose Davenal. Miss Davenal felt nearly sure it must be a niece of her old friend to whom she was that evening engaged. Lady Reid's late husband had a brother in the civil service at Bombay, reported to be a rich man, and it was probable this was his daughter.

"It is just like Edward," she said tartly to Sara, as she watched for the carriage. "To think that he should marry after a month or two's acquaintance! He can't have known her much longer."

"But he says she is so pretty, aunt; so loveable!" was Sara's pleading answer. "And — if she is an heiress, I am very glad for Edward's sake."

"Ah," grimly returned Miss Bettina, having as usual heard all awry, "that's it, no doubt, the money's sake. I don't forget a good old proverb: 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure!' Here comes the carriage."

They went down to it. Neal, all perfection as usual, assisted them in and took his place by the side of the driver. They were nearly at their journey's end when, in passing a row of houses, Sara, who happened to be looking out, saw Oswald Cray at one of the windows: and by his side a fair face half hidden by the crimson curtain; the face of Jane Allister.

A mist gathered over her eyes and her heart. She looked out still, mechanically; she saw the name written up as they left the houses behind them, "Bangalore Terrace;" she answered her aunt's remarks as before: but the change within her was as if sunshine had given place to night.

Why, could she still be cherishing those past hopes? No:

never for an instant. She knew that all was over between her and Oswald Cray; that he was entirely lost to her. But she could not put away from her the old feelings and the old love; she could not see him thus in familiar companionship with another, without bitter pangs and wild emotion. Perhaps Jane Allister was to be his wife!

Neal left them at Lady Reid's, his orders being to return with the carriage a quarter before eleven. When he reached home it was dusk; and Dorcas, attired in her bonnet and shawl, came to him in the passage, and said she was going out to do a little shopping.

Neal watched her fairly off, and then went in-doors. He closed the shutters of the dining parlour, went up to the drawing-room, where he set the candle on the table, and closed those shutters also. He took a leisurely survey of the room, apparently searching for something, and reading, *en passant*, a note or two left upon the mantel-piece, and then he took his seat before Sara's desk.

That little episode, the spoiled lock of the doctor's desk, had taught him caution; he would not make the same mistake with this. Neal was an adept at his work: and, by the ingenious use of a penknife and a piece of wire, the desk was opened. It may be a question how long Neal had waited for this opportunity. Such a one had not occurred for months: his ladies out, and Dorcas out; and the house wrapped in the silence of night, and not likely to be invaded.

And now, a word to my readers. Should there be any among you who may feel inclined to cavil at this description of Neal's treachery, deeming it improbable, let me tell you that it is but the simple truth — a recital of an episode in real life. The reading of the letters, the opening of the desks, the ferreting propensities, the treachery altogether, were practised by a retainer in a certain family, and the mischief

wrought was incalculable. It separated those in spirit who had never been separated before; it gave rise to all sorts of misconception and ill-feeling; it caused animosity to prevail between relatives for years: and the worst was — the worst, the worst! — that some of those relatives were never reconciled again in this world, for, before the truth came to light, death had been busy. As Coleridge says,

“Whispering tongues can poison truth.”

What Neal's motive was, I cannot tell you. What the motive of that other one was, was as little to be traced. There was nothing to be *gained* by it, so far as could be seen. It may have been that the prying propensities were innate in both natures; the love of working mischief inherent in their hearts. Certainly it was the ruling passion of their lives. The most extraordinary inventions, the strangest stories were related by the one: you will find, before you have done with the other, that they were not abjured by him.

The first letter Neal came to in the desk — at least, the first he opened — happened to be one from Mr. Wheatley. By that he learned that two hundred pounds had been lent to Sara in the summer, for the “completion of the payment she spoke of.” Coupled with his previously acquired knowledge, Neal came to the conclusion that the trouble as regarded Captain Davenal was over, and the money paid. The precise nature of the trouble Neal had never succeeded in arriving at, but he did know that money had to be paid in secret on his account. The next letter he came upon, was the one received from the Captain that day: and if Neal had hoped to find groans and trouble and difficulty in it, he was most completely disappointed. It was one of the sunniest letters ever read; it spoke of his girl-wife and his own happiness: not a breath was there in it of care in any shape. Neal was nonplussed: and the letters did not afford him pleasure.

"The thing all settled! — the money paid!" he repeated to himself, revolving the various items of news. "No wonder *she* has looked sprightly lately. Why, for months after the doctor's death, she seemed fit to hang herself! I thought some change had come to her. And he is married, is he! — and has picked up an heiress! I don't like that. Some folks do have the luck of it in this world. It's a great shame! And she has no right to be happy, for I know she hates me. I know she suspects me, that's more. I'll try — I'll *try* and deal out a little small coin in exchange. There's always that other thing, thank goodness; the break with Mr. Oswald Cray. I wonder if she saw him this evening at that window? I did; and I saw the young lady too. I hope it's going to be a match, if only to serve out this one!"

With this charitable wish, Mr. Neal resumed his research of the desk. But nothing more of particular moment turned up, and he soon made it fast again in his own artistic manner, which defied detection.

And when Dorcas came in, she found Neal, his supper eaten, stretched comfortably before the kitchen fire, taking a doze.

CHAPTER XII.

Was she never to be at Peace?

News of an unpleasant nature was on its way to Miss Davenal and Sara; but they sat at breakfast, unconscious of its nearness, waited upon by Neal the immaculate, in all confiding security, and entirely unsuspecting of that gentleman's desk researches of the previous evening. A letter came in; it was directed to Miss Davenal in the handwriting of Dr. Keen.

"What's agate now?" exclaimed Miss Davenal, as she

opened it. For it was not very usual for the doctor to write in the middle of a quarter.

"DEAR MADAM, —

"I grieve much to have to inform you that an accident has happened to your nephew Leopold. It being a half-holiday yesterday afternoon (granted according to annual custom, on the auspicious occasion of Mrs. Keen's birthday), the young gentlemen had leave accorded them to go into the fields and gather blackberries. Engaged in this (hitherto deemed harmless) recreation, Leopold unfortunately met with a fall. In stretching up to reach a high branch, he lost his balance, and fell from the top of a bank. I fear he may have been pushed, but the boys appear not to be quite clear upon the point. At any rate, he fell in some way with his arm doubled under him, and on examination, it proved to be broken.

"Deeply sorry as I am to be obliged to impart to you this sad news, I can yet qualify it in some degree by stating that it is a simple fracture. It was at once set, and the surgeon assures me it will do as well as possible. Mrs. Keen bids me say that she does not think Master Leopold has appeared very strong of late; I have remarked myself that he looks delicate. Master Davenal, I am happy to say, is quite well, and gives us every satisfaction in his studies, in which he takes great pleasure.

"With very kind remembrances from Mrs. Keen to yourself and Miss Sara Davenal, and best compliments from myself, —

"I remain, dear Madam,

"Faithfully yours,

"JOHN KEEN.

"Miss Davenal."

Miss Bettina gave the letter to her niece in an access of

vexation. "If that mischievous Dick was not at the bottom of it, I shall wonder!" she exclaimed. "He pushed him off in his roughness. He is rough."

Sara gathered in the words of the letter in silence, with strained eyes and a beating heart.

"I'd have every blackberry-tree in the land rooted up, if I had my will," proceeded Miss Bettina. "Boys are as venturesome as monkeys when their mouths are in question. They don't care for their clothes or how they get torn; they don't care for their shirt-fronts or how they get stained; they fight, and quarrel, and climb, and scratch their hands and faces with the thorns, and all for greediness — that they may fill themselves with those rubbishing berries. And now they have caused this mischief! The boy's arm may be weak for life. Yes, if I had the power, I'd destroy every blackberry-tree that grows. I should think Dr. Keen will interdict 'black-berrying' for the future."

"I wonder how it happened!" said Sara, musingly.

"So do I," said Miss Bettina, in a tart tone. "One would think the bank was as high as a house. They'd climb up a house, boys would, if they thought they should find blackberries growing upon its roof. Ah, never shall I forget — it has this moment recurred to my mind — Leo's father coming home in a sorry plight when he was a boy. *He* went black-berrying. He went without anybody's knowledge, too, and was absent for hours, and we grew alarmed at home, as was natural, for he was but a little fellow of eight. I remember my dear mother feared he had fallen into some pond, but we children thought Johnny had gone after the wild-beast caravan, which had been in the town exhibiting two bears and an elephant. He arrived at home at dusk; and I'm sure he looked more fit to belong to a caravan than to a gentleman's house. His knees were out of his trousers, and his brown-

holland blouse was in flounces, and his shirt-frill had three hanging rents in it, and his hair and face and hands were crimson with the stains, causing my mother to cry out with fear at the first sight of him. To crown all, he had filled his new straw hat with the blackberries, and the juice was dropping through the crown! John does not forget that exploit, I know, to this day. Your grandpapa gave him a sound whipping and sent him to bed supperless; not so much for the plight he had put himself into, as for roaming out alone and frightening my dear mother. Johnny was ill for three days afterwards with stomach-ache, from the quantity he had devoured. *He* remembers blackberrying, I know; and I should think Mr. Leo will, after this."

"I hope his arm will soon be well!"

"Dr. Keen might have mentioned what surgeon was attending to it! If Mark Cray had remained at Hallingham," continued Miss Bettina, very sharply — for it was impossible for her to speak of that exit of Mark's without sharpness — "he might have gone over by rail, and seen that it was being properly — What do you say, Neal?"

Miss Bettina's interruption was caused by the entrance of Neal. Mrs. Cray's maid had come round, and was waiting to speak to Miss Sara.

"Let her come in," said Miss Bettina.

The tone was as sharp a one as that just given to the absent Mark. Caroline's maid, a remarkably fashionable damsel, did not reign in the favour of Miss Bettina. She came in in obedience to orders; a pink gauze bonnet on the back of her head, and a pair of dirty and very tight straw-coloured gloves strained on her hands. Miss Bettina's countenance lost none of its severity as she surveyed her.

"What do you want, Long?"

"If you please, mem, my message is to Miss Sara Da-

venal," returned Long, pertly, for she did not like Miss Bettina any more than Miss Bettina liked her.

"Tell it, then. Miss Sara Davenal's there, you see."

Long fairly turned her back on Miss Bettina as she delivered the message she was charged with. She explained that Mr. Cray's mother and sisters had arrived unexpectedly the previous night, and the object of her coming round now was, to ask if Miss Sara Davenal would go out with Mrs. Cray senior that morning.

"Arrived last night unexpectedly!" exclaimed Miss Bettina, who had been bending her ear. "How many of them?"

"Four," replied Long. "Mrs. Cray and three Miss Crays."

"It's well the house is large! *I* should not like to be taken by storm in that way."

"I suppose I can go, aunt?"

"I suppose you can't refuse. What's it for? Where is she going?"

"Where is Mrs. Cray going, do you know, Long?" asked Sara.

"I believe she's only going shopping, miss," answered the girl, who was always civil to Sara. "I heard her say she must get a bonnet, and other things, before she could appear in London. My mistress has promised to take the young ladies out, and she said perhaps you'd be so good as accompany Mrs. Cray senior, as she does not know London."

"I don't think I know it much better than she does," observed Sara, smiling. "But you can tell Mrs. Cray that I shall be happy to accompany her; and to render her any service that I can. Oh! and, Long, will you tell your mistress that we have received sad news from Dr. Keen," she resumed, as the maid was turning away. "Poor little Leopold has broken his arm."

"And that he did it scrambling after blackberries," indignantly added Miss Bettina.

The maid departed, saying that Mrs. Cray senior would be round in the course of the morning. Sara went up to the drawing-room, and opened her letter-case, which she used sometimes instead of her desk. Her first thought was to write a few words to poor Leo. But, ere she began, she leaned her aching brow upon her hand; the vision she had seen at the window of Bangalore Terrace, as they drove to Lady Reid's the previous evening, had left its sting upon her brain.

A slight tap at the door, and Neal came in. He could not but note the weary expression of her face as she looked up at him. He advanced to the table, some papers in his hand, and spoke in a low voice as if what he said was for her ear alone.

"The postman brought another letter, Miss Sara. It was enclosed in this envelope addressed to me by Master Richard. Perhaps you would like to see what he says."

Neal was really honest in this. Possibly he saw no opportunity to be otherwise. Sara, in some curiosity, took the papers from Neal's hands. The whole lot was characteristic of Dick. The envelope was addressed "Mr. Neal, at Miss Davenal's. Private," the proper address of their residence being added. On opening it when delivered to him by the postman, Neal had found it to contain a sealed letter for Miss Sara Davenal and a scrap of paper evidently torn from a copy-book for himself. On the latter, he read the following lines, and these he now showed to his young mistress.

"Dear Neal, give the note to my couzin Sara when nobodys buy and be sure dont let aunt bett see it or therell be a row, R. D."

"Oh, thank you, Neal," she said heartily. But as the

man left the room and she broke the seal, a half dread came over her of what it would contain.

“DEAR SARA, —

“The most horrid catastrofy has hapened, leo’s gone and broke his arm, and I want to tell you how it was done I must tell somebody or I shall burst, leo’s a brave littel chap and kept his mouth shut when old Keen and the doctor were asking questions and let him think it was through the blackberys, we had half holliday it was Mrs. Keens berthday and we went after the blackberys, this was yesterday afternoon, and about 6 of us, me and Jones and tom Keen and Halliday and leo and Thomson, if you want to know which of us it was, where separated from the rest and got into one of farmer clupp’s feilds and what should we see but his poney trying to nibble at the short grass, we set up a shout, which Halliday stoppt for fear of being heard, and caught him, and then there was a shindy as to which 3 of us should have first ride, for we were affraid thered not be time for the other 3 if the school came up, and the under master dogskin (thats our name for him hes a sneek) was with them, so to end the dispute we all 6 got on the poney and a stunning gallopp we had only it was rather close to sit, well leo was the hindmost and as he hadnt much beside the tail to sit on he fell off, but he must be a great duff for he had held on all round the feild once, he says it was Jones moved and made him fall and tom Keen says hes sure it was, for Jones who has got the longest legs kept jogging them to make the poney go and he was next to leo and leo held on by him, I was first and guided the poney and in taking the sweep round at the turning leo shot off behind, his arm was doubled under him and a soft duffer of an arm it must be for it took and broke, we didnt know he was gone at first, Jones called out, young Davenal’s off, but

we thought nothing and galloped all round the feild again, he was lying there when we got back, and his face was white and we called to him and he never answered so we stopt the poney and went to him, Jones tried to pull him up and leo screamed, and halliday calls out Im blest if I dont think hes hurt, leo began saying he hoped he wasnt kill'd, you know what a regular little muff he is, we picked him up at last and when we saw his arm hang down we were frightened above a bit, well we didnt know what was to be done, we carried him into the next feild where the poney wasnt, for fear of anybody suspecting and just as we had layd him by the bank the rest of the fellows came down the lane and saw us and tom keen called out that davenal junior was hurt, with that they came up and Marsh (thats dogskin) looks up at the high bank above leo and sees the blackberys growing atop of it and sings out to leo, I know how this was done, you where on the top of that bank trying to get blackberys beyond your reach and you fell off it, well if you'll believe me sara we never told the story to say yes, only Jones said says he I'm sure I dont know sir how ever he managed to fall, and Marsh he thought he did fall off the bank and went off to take the news to Keen, and us 6 all thought what a jolly chance it was that we had hapened to lay him down by the bank, and none of them ever saw the poney, leo was caried home and Mrs. Keen she came out with a face as white as his, tom how did it hapen, says she laying hold of tom, and we got affraid again, for toms uncomon fond of his mother, but he didnt split, and then Keen came and the surjon came and Keen he says to leo how *did* you fall did any body push you off the bank, no sir says leo, and the surjon he asked how it was done, and leo shook like anything, and began to cry, affraid he should have to tell a story at last which he cant bare, he was shut up in a room then with the doctor and Keen and one or two more and

we heard him cry out when they were setting his arm, but you know what a baby he is poor littel chap and I wish with all my hart it had been me instead of him, the worst is I should have lost my share of the supper and a jolly good one they give us on her berthday every year, cakes and tarts and pidjon pies and lots of things and we have to dress for it and a heap of duffing girls come to it in white frocks but we dont mind em much, and dear sara thats the whole facts of how it came about and I couldn't write it truer if I were telling it to poor Uncle Richard himself, leos all jolly this morning and he is in bed and has got no lessons to do and he says I am to tell you that he'll never get on a poney with 6 again and Mrs. Keens very kind to him, and Miss Keen (shes the big one you know) is going to read him some storys, he says I am to tell you it doesn't hurt much and oh sara there's only one thing we are sorry for, that Uncle Richard isnt alive to cure him because hed have him home to Hallingham to do it and perhaps me as well and I should get a holliday from these horrid books, I shall send this to neal for fear of aunt bett, and mind you hide it, and dont let a sight of it reach her, we are aufully afraid of that about the poney getting to old keens ears for thered be the dickens to pay, yours affectionately

"DICK.

"p s leo sends his love and he hopes you wont be angry with him for breaking his arm and I am writing this after school at twelve instead of playing, Good buy."

Sara smiled, in spite of herself, as she folded up the letter. But she thought it rather a wonder there had not been a few broken legs among the "6," instead of one broken arm.

She got ready for Mrs. Cray, and went down to the

dining-room. Miss Bettina was gone out then. She took up a book, but had not been looking at it many minutes when she saw Neal coming up the street talking to a young person, whose condition in life it was rather difficult to guess. In these days of *dress*, it is difficult. She had a pretty face, Sara could see that, though a veil covered it; her gown was one of those called a "washing silk" — and very much "washed out" it seemed to be; and a smart shawl, just flung on the shoulders, trailed on the ground behind. But for this trailing shawl and a sort of general untidiness, there would have been something superior about the girl. In the face she looked like a lady, and Sara had seen many a lady worse dressed.

Sara, behind the blind, could see them, but they could not see her. Neal stood a moment at the door, and then looked down over the railings of the area.

"Are the ladies out?" he asked.

"Yes," came back for answer in Dorcas's voice. The woman evidently did not know that Miss Sara had not accompanied her mistress.

"You can come in then," Sara distinctly heard Neal say to the lady — if lady she was. And he opened the door with his latch-key.

They stood talking in the passage for some little time in an under-tone, and then Neal took her into the back room. It opened to the dining-room with folding doors; but the doors were always kept closed: and indeed the back room was chiefly used as Neal's pantry. Sara, who at first had been doubtful whether it might not be a visitor to herself, came to the conclusion that it was only a visitor to Neal, and she resumed her reading.

But the voices grew rather louder. And the words "Captain Davenal" caused her to look up with a start. No wonder

she should start at that name, remembering the past. A sudden fear came over her that something or other connected with that past was again threatening her brother.

She could not hear more, for the voices dropped again to their covert tone. Another minute, and Neal was conducting the stranger to the front door.

"We shall hear more by the next mail; but there's not the slightest doubt he's married," Sara heard him say as he passed the room. "The lady is an heiress: a Miss Reid."

"Well," cried the other voice, "I'll have satisfaction. I'll have it somehow. I don't care what punishment it brings him to, I'll have it."

The visitor went away. Neal closed the street-door upon her and turned to behold his young mistress at that of the dining-room, a scared look in her eyes, a white shade upon her face.

"Neal! what has that young" — Sara hesitated between the words *person* and *lady*, but chose the former — "person to do with Captain Davenal?"

She had spoken without reflection in her impulse; in her renewed fear, which she had deemed buried with the past. Neal for once in his life was confounded. He did not speak immediately: he was probably striving to recal what had been said, inconvenient for her to hear.

"Tell me at once, Neal; I insist on your speaking," she reiterated, attributing his hesitation to unwillingness to speak. "Indeed it is better that I should know it. What was she saying about my brother?"

That alarm of some nature had been aroused within her, that she was painfully anxious, and that the alarm and anxiety were connected with Captain Davenal, Neal could

not fail to read. But his speech was certainly less ready than usual, for he still kept silence.

"I heard you tell her that Captain Davenal was married; that further news would be in by the next mail," pursued Sara, growing more inwardly perturbed with every moment. "What was it to her? Who is she? For what purpose did she come here? Neal! *can't* you answer me?" and her voice grew quite shrill with its alarm and pain.

"Miss Sara — if I hesitated to answer, it is that I do not like to speak," he said at length. "I tell the young woman she must be mistaken in what she says — that it *can't be*. But she won't hear me."

"What is it that she says? Have you seen her before to-day?"

"She has been here once or twice before. But for understanding that you and my mistress were out, I should not have allowed her to come in this time. I am very sorry that it should have happened, miss."

"But what is it?" returned Sara, nearly wild with suspense. "What has she come for?"

"She has come to ask questions about Captain Davenal."

"But *what* about him? What is he to her?"

Neal coughed. He took out his handsome silk handkerchief — he always used very handsome ones — and wiped his mouth. Sara trembled. His manner was unpleasantly mysterious, and it seemed that she was on the verge of hearing something terrible.

"Does she know my brother?"

"She says she does. Miss Sara, I would have given a great deal to prevent this happening to-day. It will only worry you, and I daresay I could still have put her off and kept her quiet."

"Neal, tell me the worst," she cried, her voice and heart alike growing faint. "I must hear it now."

"Well, Miss Sara, she says she is the wife of Captain Davenal."

"She — says — she — is — the — wife — of — Captain Davenal!"

The words were echoed slowly in very astonishment, a pause between each. Vague as her fears had been, they had not touched on this.

"It is what she says, Miss Sara. I told her it must be one of two things — either that she was deceiving me in saying it, or that she was herself deceived. But she insists upon it that she is his true and lawful wife; that she was married to him nearly twelve months before he went abroad. She says my late master, Dr. Davenal, knew of it."

Sara stared at Neal in a sort of helpless manner. Never for a moment did it occur to her to question the truth; her mind accepted it; a terrible calamity; worse, it seemed in this moment, than all that had gone before.

"She came here this morning in consequence of hearing of the Captain's marriage to Miss Reid. I acknowledged that news had come home to that effect: it would have been quite useless, you see, Miss Sara, to deny what's known publicly."

"Neal! Neal! you will not mention this?" came the feverish wish, the first uttered in her bewilderment. "You will guard it faithfully? We — I — some one must see what can be done."

"You may entirely depend on me, Miss Sara," replied Neal, speaking more impressively than was his wont, — Neal the impassive. "Of course, miss, the chief thing will be to guard against exposure."

Sara turned into the dining-room, mind and body alike sinking. A sick, faint fear came over her that *this* must be

the secret connected with her brother, which had been disclosed that long past night to Dr. Davenal. Another moment, and she did not see how that could be. There would have been no *crime* in it: Captain Davenal was not married then. Her brain was in a chaos of perplexity, her mind agitated with doubt. If this young woman — lady — whatever she might be, was Edward's wife, how could he have married Rose Reid? Was it the money tempted him? Calm, self-controlled though she was usually, a groan of despair broke from her lips.

Neal in the back room thought she called him, and came round to the dining-room door. She looked up as he stood there, and stared at him, just as though she had forgotten who he was.

"Did you call, Miss Sara?"

"I — I — I did not call. Neal — do you know — what the name is? — I mean — what it *was*?"

"Yes, miss, I know so much as that. Catherine Wentworth."

He retired, leaving Sara alone. Almost a rebellious thought was stealing over her — was she *never* to be at rest? Not at much rest just then certainly; for Mrs. Cray had driven to the door and was asking for her.

Sara tied her bonnet mechanically and went out. Mrs. Cray was seated in a fly. She would not alight then, she said: she had a great deal to do. Sara stepped in. Mrs. Cray was an imperious-looking woman, fair and pale, with a handsome face. Sara thought her over-dressed and very fidgety. They were not much acquainted when at Hallingham.

"I have nothing to wear," she said to Sara. "I want a host of things. A bonnet first. Mrs. Mark Cray has given

me the address of a superior dress-maker. She is a little selfish, is she not?"

"Who is?" cried Sara in answer to the sentence, which came out rather abruptly after the rest.

"Mrs. Mark Cray. To confess to you my opinion, I think she might have lent me the carriage this morning, instead of sending me out in a hired fly, and keeping the carriage for herself and the girls. It seems to be the way of the world nowadays; the young before the old. She is Mark's wife, and I am only his mother."

Whether Sara would have found a suitable answer is uncertain. Something outside completely took away all thoughts of it. They were at that moment passing the War Office: and, coming from it with an angry and determined look upon her pretty face, was the person whom she had just heard called Catherine Wentworth. Sara shrunk back in the cab's corner, dismay on her countenance, dismay in her heart. Had she *already* denounced Captain Davenal at headquarters?

From milliners to linen-drapers, from linen-drapers to dress-makers, one place after another continually, until Sara was tired to death, the day wore away. The afternoon was getting on when the last commission was done, and Mrs. Cray, who had put on the new bonnet just bought, had leisure to think of the horse and driver.

"Poor things, they must want some repose," she remarked, as she came out of the Pantheon. "Well, there's only one place more. Will you tell the man, my dear?" she added, as she got in. "Parliament Street. You know the number, I suppose."

"What number?" inquired Sara. "Where to in Parliament Street?"

"To Mr. Oswald Cray's. Bracknell and Street, I think, is the name of the firm."

"*There!*" returned Sara in her discomposure. "I can't go there."

"Not go there! My dear, I must go there. Mr. Oswald Cray is my step-son. I shall call in for a minute to let him know I am in London."

Opposition would be worse than acquiescence. Besides, what could be her plea? Sara, all her pulses fluttering, spoke the address to the driver, and took her place in silence opposite Mrs. Cray.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Benn's Wrongs.

"THEN, Benn, I'll not have it done! You can't go."

"But I tell you I have got my orders. I am sent."

"And who gave you the orders pray, Joe Benn? Who sent you?"

"Mr. Oswald Cray. And the best thing for *you* to do is to hold your tongue and take off that there guy of a bonnet, and hide your bare arms, and put on a apron that's clean, and otherwise make yourself decent, for you *have got* to do it. And when folks have got to do a thing, they may as well make up their minds to do it in the best way and readiest way they can."

Mr. Benn, in thus breathlessly telling his wife she had "got to do it," did not allude to the little items of personal embellishment he mentioned, but to something else which Mrs. Benn abhorred above all things — that of waiting on gentlemen. It happened now and then that a luncheon or other meal would be ordered at the offices in Parliament Street for some stranger or friend stopping in London, which

meal Mrs. Benn had to prepare, and her husband to wait at. On this day, Mr. Street had ordered mutton-chops to be ready for two o'clock, and the tray laid for three persons, and this it was that was discomposing Mrs. Benn. In the first place, it was one of those oft-recurring periodical battles of her life — a cleaning day; in the next place, her husband had just given her the startling information that she would have to wait at the meal as well as to cook it. "And a fine object you be, to do it!" he had wound up with in a mutter to himself.

Certainly Mrs. Benn did not appear to particular advantage to-day, looking at her in an artistic point of view. You have had the pleasure of seeing her once before in the high costume donned for the occasion of those days specially marked in her calendar. I don't think there's much change. Her bonnet, black once, rusty brown now, is on, brim downwards crown up, strings tied in a knot at the back; her apron is a piece of wrappering off a bale of goods, embellished with sundry holes and fastened round her with an iron skewer; and her gown, turned up under it, is pinned into a heap behind. She stands over the Dutch oven, her arms bare and black, and a fork in her hand; and ever and anon as she stoops to turn or touch the chops in the Dutch oven, the gathered gown sways itself up at the back, not unlike a sail. Mr. Benn is in his shirt sleeves, having taken off his coat to brush it, preparatory to going out.

"It's sure to be the case! I've marked it times and times again!" burst forth Mrs. Benn, trying to fling off a live coal which had intruded itself into the Dutch oven. "If ever there's lunch or any bothering extra of that sort wanted, it's safe to be on my cleaning day! Mr. Street have got no more consideration nor a stalking gander; and Mr. Oswald Cray have got as little. They *might* remember my cleaning days, and spare a body on 'em."

"And a fine speech that is," said Mr. Benn, in a reprimanding tone. "You'd better not let it come anigh their ears. We are here, you and me, to do what work's required of us, at any hour, whether it's cooking or whether it's waiting, and your ord'nary work must give way when it's wanted to give it. They'd soon get other servants in our places."

"He comes to the top o' the stairs just as the clock was going one," observed Mrs. Benn, paying no more attention to the words of her husband than if she had been deaf. "'Are you there?' he calls out, and I looked up and see it was Mr. Street. 'Yes, sir,' says I, 'I be;' and I was in a cloud of dust at the moment fit to smother you, a doing out of that there wood and bottle cupboard. 'Oh,' says he, 'some mutton-chops for two o'clock, and lay the tray for three. And do 'em well,' says he 'and a dish of mashed potatoes.'" A nice thing that was for me to hear! and to have to go out the figure I be, after chops, and to be hindered in my cleaning a good two hours! Ain't that enough, Joe Benn, without having to turn to and wait?"

"I can't help it," said Joe, civilly, as he put on his coat. "If I am ordered work out of doors I must go about it, just as you must the work, in. Mr. Oswald Cray has sent me down to Limehouse, and I must be back before the office closes. Don't I tell you I can't even stop for my dinner?"

He went away without more words. He probably would have had a few sent after him, but for an unlucky catastrophe that occurred at the moment. The saucepan of potatoes fell on its side, and enveloped Mrs. Benn and the Dutch oven in a mass of steam. It took all that lady's best attention to remedy it; and when she looked up, Mr. Benn was gone.

Very reluctantly indeed did she set about making herself presentable; but, as Benn had said, there was no help for it. She washed her face and hands, and turned down the gown

and drew down its sleeves and put on a white apron, and replaced the choice bonnet with a clean cap, grumbling bitterly all the time. And at the appointed hour she took up the luncheon tray.

Three gentlemen partook of the meal — Mr. Street, Oswald Cray, and a well-known contractor, who had only that day arrived in London from Spain, and was going into the country to his works by a four-o'clock train. They were discussing business while they ate.

A certain projected line of rail in Spain was being organised. Bracknell and Street were the engineers, and it was proposed that Mr. Oswald Cray should go out as superintendent. The details of the affair do not concern us; but it must be mentioned that the sojourn in Spain would be likely, from certain attendant circumstances, to prove of great advantage to Mr. Oswald Cray in a pecuniary point of view.

After the departure of the guest, Mr. Street and Oswald remained together a few minutes talking. "You'll not think of declining it, of course, Cray," remarked the latter. "I only wish I could go!"

"I don't see how you will manage without me here," remarked Oswald.

"We must manage in the best way we can. Bracknell must be with us more than he has been lately. Of course we could send somebody else to do the Spain business, were it impossible that you could leave; but it is not impossible, and I speak in your interest when I say it is a chance you ought not to miss."

"True. I shall like to go, if home affairs can spare me. I suppose it will involve a stay there of two years?"

"Nearer three," remarked Mr. Street. "Then we will con-

sider your going as settled; and things must be at once prepared at home contingent upon it."

"Yes," acquiesced Oswald. "Wait a moment," he added, as Mr. Street was turning away to descend. "I want to speak to you about Allister. I wish you would take him on again."

Mr. Street pursed his lips up. He had a round face and small light eyes, in which sat a hard look. Whether it was the hard look or not, I can't tell, or whether it was that the look was only the index of the nature — as it generally is — certain it was, that Mr. Street was not liked in the house. Oswald knew the sign of the contracted lips.

"What is your objection?" he pursued. "Allister's quite well apparently, and —"

"Apparently! there it is," interrupted Mr. Street. "It's a great hindrance to business, these sickly clerks — well one day, ill the next; especially in such a house as ours. We have no time for it."

"Allister seems well. At one time I thought his lungs were fatally diseased, but I begin to believe I was entirely mistaken. It is nearly twelve months since the worst symptoms left him, and he seems now as strong as I am."

"Pooh!" said Mr. Street. "A warm climate, if he could get to it, might set him up; but in this place of change and fogs and damp, rely upon it he'll not keep well long."

Oswald was silent. So far as the warm climate went, he agreed with Mr. Street. Had Frank Allister the opportunity of going to one, it might set him up for a long life.

"How has he lived?" asked Mr. Street. "He has no money."

"He has done work at home lately. We have furnished him with some to do; plans and estimates, and such like. He has had tracings also from another house or two."

"Is that sister of his with him still?"

"Yes. She is a faithful ally. She has taken a daily situation as companion to a blind lady. It all helps to bring grist to the mill. Allister is very anxious to come back, Mr. Street. I really see no reason why he should not. I am sure of one thing — that he is as capable of doing his work here now as any clerk we employ."

"Now. Will you guarantee that he shall continue capable of doing it?"

"I wish I could guarantee it."

"Of course. If wishes were horses — you know the old adage. Were I to take him on now, perhaps in winter he would get ill, and have to leave again. We can't afford those interruptions."

"I trust indeed he would not. He passed well through last winter; improving in it every day."

"Last winter was a mild one, except for a little extreme cold we had in November. Next winter may be a severe one. I tell you, Cray, there's only one safeguard for Allister; and that's a warmer climate. At any rate, a more settled one. Such is my opinion."

Oswald would not give in. "Considering that Allister is now in health and strength —"

"Strength for him," put in Mr. Street.

"Well, strength for him, if you like to put it so, but I am sure you would be surprised to see how strong he does appear to be. Considering this, and that he believes himself to be permanently and radically cured, it will sound very hard to him if I tell him that we cannot take him back again."

"If your wish is to have him back — that is, if you make a personal matter of it — have him," said Mr. Street. "I see you want it."

"Yes, I do," said Oswald. "I wish him back, both as a

matter of personal liking and that his services are efficient. This departure of mine for Spain will involve the taking on of at least one more clerk. Let it be Allister."

"Have it as you like, then," said Mr. Street. "Let Allister come back at once. Tell him to come on Monday."

So it was settled. They went down talking together, and encountered Mrs. Benn on the lower passage with a hearth-broom in her hand.

"May I take the tray away, gentlemen?"

Oswald nodded, and the woman went upstairs, her face and her temper as crusty as they could be.

"I wonder the world's let go on!" she ejaculated, as she flung the broom on a chair and began to put the things together on the tray. "I wonder how *they'd* like to have a day's cleaning to do, and to be called off for three mortal hours in the midst of it? It's four o'clock if it's a minute, and I was stopped in my work at one; and if that's not three hours, I'd like to know what is. I've set to nothing since; how can I, dressed up to please them? and I'm sure — my! what cormorants!"

The subjoined sentence, given utterance to by Mrs. Benn in her surprise, had reference to the mutton-chop dish, on which her eyes had just rested. She stood a moment gazing at it, her hands uplifted.

"If they haven't gone and ate 'em all! Nine thick chops, and only the tails of two of 'em left! Well, I'd not own to such famine if I was gentlefolks. I sent 'em up for show — for I don't forget the trimming I got for skimping the number last time chops was ordered — never supposing they'd eat 'em. I meant two of them chops to come up again for Mr. Oswald Cray's dinner; they'd have done for him, warmed up. And now they're demolished! — and I must dance out again to that butcher's — and Benn a-wanting something with *his* tea,

as he's sure to do, going out without his dinner! — and me with all the lower part of the house to do yet! — and got my things to change again! It's a wonder the world *do* go on!"

She carried the tray down; but what with glasses and other things, she could not carry all at once, and had to make two journeys of it. It did not add to her geniality of mood. Arrived in the kitchen the second time, she took the things off the tray, folded the cloth carefully — for in such matters she was very particular — and laid it in the dresser-drawer. Then putting the other things in a stack to be washed by and by, she began to make preparations for resuming the interrupted work. As a preliminary to this, she slowly turned her gown up over the white apron, and looked round for the broom. After casting her eyes in all directions, and casting them in vain, recollection returned to her.

"Drat the broom! If I haven't gone and left it upstairs. I wish their luncheons and their bother was far enough!"

She turned down her gown again, possibly lest she might encounter either of her masters on the way, and proceeded up the kitchen stairs. The broom lay on the chair where she had flung it, in Oswald's sitting-room. As she took it up she espied some crumbs under the table, and stooped down to brush them carefully into her hand, grumbling all the while.

"It's just like 'em! dropping their crumbs down like so many children! The trouble I'd used to have with that when old Bracknell was here! He'd shake his table-napkin on the carpet, he would; and Benn, he'd come away and never ——"

"Is this the room? Is he here?"

To be interrupted by those words in a female voice close to her elbow brought Mrs. Benn to her legs at once. A lady

in a gay white bonnet and violet-tipped feathers, with other attire on the same grand corresponding scale, stood confronting her. Mrs. Benn could only stare in the first moment from consternation. And the lady stared too, first at the room, then at Mrs. Benn, waiting for her question to be answered.

"Is who here?" cried Mrs. Benn.

"Mr. Oswald Cray. We were ushered up here by a young man whom we saw in the passage. He said this was Mr. Oswald Cray's room, and he would send him to us. Is he well?"

Mrs. Benn naturally looked round for some one to whom the "we" could apply, and saw a young lady at the door. A sweet-looking young lady whose manner was timid and hesitating, as if she did not like to advance further into the room. You need not be told that it was Sara Davenal. She had wished to remain in the fly while Mrs. Cray came up; but Mrs. Cray had insisted on being accompanied by her indoors, and Sara was obliged to yield, for she was unable to give any good reason against it. How could she hint at the relations which had once existed between her and Mr. Oswald Cray? — at the love that lingered still?

"He's as well as a body can be; leastways if his luncheon's anything to go by, which he have just eat," replied Mrs. Benn in answer to the question of the lady, whom she had not taken a fancy to, as she was permitting her tone to show. "Did you want him?"

"I have come to see him," was the answer. "He is my step-son, and we have not met for a good while."

Mrs. Benn's manner turned to a sudden thaw. In her crusty way she was fond of her master, Mr. Oswald Cray; and she thought she might as well be civil to the lady before her as his step-mother.

"Take a seat, ladies," she said, dusting two chairs with her white apron, and disposing herself to be cordial and confidential. Fate seemed to be against Mrs. Benn's cleaning that day, and we most of us resign ourselves to what can't be helped. This appearance of Mr. Oswald Cray's step-mother Mrs. Benn regarded as an era in that gentleman's life, for she could not remember that during his whole residence there, any living relative had come to inquire after him, with the exception of his brother.

"His step-mother," cried she approvingly, as she stood behind a chair and rested her arms on the back of it, one hand grasping the brush. "And might your name be the same as his, ma'am — Mrs. Oswald Cray?"

"I am Mrs. Cray," replied the lady, with emphasis on the one word, and an impulse to resent the familiarity. But she felt inclined to encourage the woman in her sociability, feeling a curiosity as to the every-day movements and doings of Mr. Oswald Cray.

Sara sat a little apart, near the centre table. Her cheek rested on her fingers, and her eyes were mechanically fixed on a small chart or plan, which lay at the end of the table opposite to where the luncheon tray had been. Quite mechanically; her thoughts were buried in the unhappy occurrence of that morning: the advent of the stranger at her house and the startling communication of Neal.

The gossip of Mrs. Cray and the woman fell on her ear like the humming of gnats in summer, heard, but not heeded. Oswald did not appear; and Mrs. Cray, always restless, as Sara had that morning found out, started from her seat and said she should go to the rooms below in search of him.

Mrs. Benn had this peculiarity — and yet, I don't know that it can be called a peculiarity, since so far as my experience teaches me, it is characteristic of women in general

— that however pressing might be her occupations, if once called off them and launched into the full tide of gossip, the urgent duties would give way, and the gossip be willingly pursued until night should fall and stop it. Mrs. Benn, deprived of her chief listener, the elder lady, turned her attention on the younger.

“Would you believe it, miss,” she said, dropping her voice to a confidential tone, “his mother’s coming here this afternoon bears out some words I said to my husband only a day or two ago, just as one’s dreams gets bore out sometimes. I says to Benn, ‘Mr. Oswald Cray’s relations ’ll be up, now there’s going to be the change.’”

“What change?” asked Sara.

“His marriage, miss.”

Ah, she was all too awake to the present now. Her lips parted; her brow turned cold. “His marriage?”

“It can’t be nothing else but his marriage,” repeated Mrs. Benn. “Benn was waiting on him at dinner, and he told him there was perhaps going to be a change, that he wouldn’t have him to wait on long, for he might be leaving. Joe Benn he comes down and repeats it to me, all wondering, like the gaby he is, what his master meant by it. Why, his wedding of course, says I; it don’t take a conjuror to tell that. Well, she’s a nice young lady.”

Sara had her hand raised to her face, apparently pushing back her braided hair. “Who is she?” came breathing from her lips: and she could hardly have helped asking it had it been to save her life.

“Well, it’s Miss Allister, if it’s anybody,” returned Mrs. Benn, in apparent contradiction of what she had just asserted. “They are as thick as two peas, and I know he goes there a’most every evening.”

Sara had heard enough. In her confusion of mind she had

scarcely noted a change taking place in the room. With the last words Mrs. Benn and her brush glided away, and Oswald Cray had come in. Some one had told him that a lady was waiting for him in his room, but he was busy at his desk at the moment and waited to finish what he was about. Nothing could well exceed his surprise when he saw, seated there, Miss Sara Davenal.

Sara rose. She saw by his manner that he was ignorant of his step-mother's visit, and she felt a little embarrassed as she explained. "She had only come with Mrs. Cray; Mrs. Cray had just gone down in search of him."

Oswald supposed she alluded to his brother's wife, and made no answering comment. As he stood with Sara's hand in his in greeting, he noted how pale she was: for the startling communication of Mrs. Benn had scared the blood from her face. It was somewhat singular that this was the first time they had been alone together since that memorable day of meeting in the Temple Gardens: they had met once or twice casually at Mark's in a full room, but not otherwise.

"Have you been well?" he asked. "You are not looking very strong."

"Oh, quite well, thank you."

Oswald hastened to ask a question that had long been on his mind. One that had troubled him perhaps more than he cared to acknowledge to himself: but he had not felt justified in seeking a special occasion to put it.

"Now that I have the opportunity, will you forgive me if I ask whether that unpleasant matter is settled that caused your visits to Essex Street? I still think you would have done wisely to confide it to me."

"It is quite settled," answered Sara, her tone full of satisfaction. "Settled and done with." Ah, poor thing, she forgot

momentarily, as she spoke, the fresh grievance opened that morning, which was perhaps connected with it.

"I am glad of it," he heartily said. "I should not like to have gone away for an indefinite period knowing that you were in any dilemma, and no one perhaps to see you out of it. Friendship may still exist between us tacitly, if not yet actively," he continued in a low earnest tone. "Nothing else is left to us."

She thought he alluded to his marriage. She stood something like a statue, feeling cruelly wronged, but loving him beyond everything in life. Not wronged by him: it was fate that wronged her: he would have loved her still, had he dared, and she felt that he honoured her in all tenderness. She felt — and the hot crimson came dyeing her face at the thought — that he loved her better than that other one.

The rebellious tears welled up to her eyes, and she turned her face away. "Are you going to be absent long?" she asked, trying to speak indifferently.

"I think so. How long I cannot tell yet. I am going to Spain."

There was a pause of silence. Sara with an air of unconcern began putting straight the crape folds on her dress skirt. Oswald turned to the door.

"Where can Caroline be?" he exclaimed. "Did you say she had gone down in search of me?"

"Not Caroline. It is not Caroline. It is Mrs. Cray, Mark's mother. I came out with her to show her the way to different places, but I did not know she was going to bring me here."

"Mark's mother!" But ere Oswald could say more, Mrs. Cray appeared. She had found her way into Mr. Street's room downstairs, thinking it might be Oswald's, and had remained making acquaintance with that gentleman. Oswald

Cray the rising engineer, and Oswald Cray the interloping little son in her husband's house, were essentially two people in the worldly mind of Mrs. Cray.

CHAPTER XIV.

An unwelcome Visitor.

MARK CRAY and his wife were attiring themselves by gas-light for some scene of evening gaiety. The past fortnight — for that period had elapsed since the arrival of Mrs. Cray in London — had brought nothing else but gaiety. Shopping in the morning, drives in the afternoon, whitebait dinners at Blackwall or Greenwich, dinners at Richmond, theatres in the evening, receptions at home, parties out; noise, bustle, whirl, and *cost*. Caroline loved the life; were it taken from her, she said randomly to Mrs. Cray one day, she could not survive, she should die of *ennui*; and the Miss Crays had never been so happy in their lives, or their mother either.

Their visit had come to an end now, and they had left for home that morning. Unwillingly, it is true, but Mrs. Cray had deemed it wise not to wear out their welcome. They were a large party; and she privately contemplated a longer visit in the spring, during the glories of the London season. Mark had treated them right regally, and had contrived to screw out from some impossible pocket a twenty-pound note, which he put into his mother's hands for the journey. "I shall be able to allow you and the girls something worth having next year, when the ore's in the market regularly," he said to her. Altogether, Mrs. Cray, was well satisfied with her impromptu visit.

"I say, Carine," cried Mark, coming forth from his dressing-room, "what's gone with my diamond studs?"

"Where's the use of asking me?" was Carine's answer,

who was turning herself slowly round before the large glass, to contemplate the effect of a new dress which her maid had just finished fixing upon her. "You must make haste, Mark, or we shall be late. The dinner's at seven, mind; and I know it does not want above a quarter."

"We shall get there in five minutes," carelessly answered Mark. "I can't find my diamond studs."

"I think they are in your dressing-case, sir," spoke up the maid. "I saw them there a day or two ago."

Mark went back, and found he had overlooked them. He finished dressing himself, all but the coat, and came into his wife's room again.

"Carry, isn't it odd what's-his name's affair to-night in Kensington Gardens? We promised to go, didn't we?"

"Of course we did, Mark. I intend to go, too. He says it will be a charming party, in spite of the world being out of town. We shall get away from the dinner by ten o'clock, I daresay. Shall I do?"

She was turning herself round before the glass, as before. Between two glasses, in fact, one in front, one behind. Her dress was some beautiful fabric, white and mauve; and her violet eyes and her glowing cheeks spoke all too plainly of her besetting vanity. Certainly, if vanity is ever pardonable, it was in Caroline Cray as she stood there, so radiant in her youth and beauty.

"Oh, you'll do," returned Mark, with scant gallantry; but his white necktie had been refractory, and he was re-settling it again. At that moment he heard a knock at his dressing-room door.

"Who's there? Come in," he called out, stepping into his own room.

One of the men-servants entered and presented a card to him. Mark, whose hands were busy with his necktie, bent

his head to read it as it lay on the silver waiter. "Mr. Brackenbury."

"Mr. Brackenbury!" repeated Mark to himself. "Who on earth's Mr. Brackenbury? I can't see anybody now," he said to the servant. "Tell him so. I am just going out."

"I told the gentleman you were on the point of going out with my mistress, sir, that the carriage was waiting at the door; but he insisted on coming in, and said you would be sure to see him."

"Who is it?" cried Caroline, stepping forward.

"Some Mr. Brackenbury. Don't know him from Adam. Go down, George, and say that I can *not* see him, or any one else, this evening."

"The idea of strangers intruding at this hour!" exclaimed Caroline. "Mark, I daresay it's somebody come to worry you to get them shares in the mine."

Mark made no reply. He was in enough "worry" just then over his neck-tie. "Bother the thing!" he cried, and pulled it off entirely with a jerk.

The servant came back again. He bore another card, a few lines added to it in pencil.

"I must and will see you. Denial is useless."

Mark Cray read the words twice over, and decided to go down. They almost seemed to imply a threat, and he did not understand threats. Mr. Brackenbury had arrived in a Hansom cab, the horse reeking with the speed it had made; but Mark did not know that yet.

"I won't be a minute, Caroline. The fellow insists on seeing me. I'll just see what he wants."

Tying on a black neck-tie temporarily — the one he had taken off earlier, — and putting on his morning coat as he descended the stairs, Mark entered the room where the visitor was waiting. And then Mark recognised Mr. Bracken-

bury as a gentleman who had recently purchased a few shares in the mine. Amidst the many, many shareholders, it was not surprising that Mark had forgotten the name of one of them. In point of fact, these few shares had been Mark's own. Being excessively pressed for ready money, he had ordered his broker to sell them out.

"Oh, Mr. Brackenbury!" said Mark, shaking hands with him in a cordial manner. "Do you know, your name had completely escaped my memory. I have not a moment to spare for you to-night. I am going out with my wife to dinner."

"Mr. Cray," said the visitor, a middle-aged, solemn-looking man, "you must return me my two hundred pounds. I have come for it."

"Return you your two hundred pounds!" echoed Mark. "My good sir, I don't understand you. What two hundred pounds?"

"The two hundred pounds I paid for those shares. They were transferred from your name to mine, therefore I know they were your own."

"They were my own," said Mark. "What of that?"

"Well, I must have the money returned to me, and you can receive back the shares. I have brought them in my pocket. I am of a determined spirit, sir, and I will have it returned."

Mark flew into a rage. He was a great man now, and great men do not take such words with impunity. "You can have your money back to-morrow," he said, with haughty contempt. "Take the shares to my broker — if you don't possess one of your own — and he will repurchase them of you."

"Ah," said Mr. Brackenbury. "But I want the money from you to-night. I want it now."

"Then you can't have it," returned Mark.

Mr. Brackenbury advanced — both of them were standing — and laid his finger on Mark's arm. "Mr. Cray, I have not come to you as an enemy; I don't wish to be one, and there's no occasion for unpleasantness between us. I want my money back, and I must have it — *I must have it*, understand, and to-night. After that, I will hold my tongue as long as it will serve you."

Was the man talking Greek? was he out of his mind? What did it mean? Mark's indignation began to lose itself in puzzled curiosity.

"I have had a private telegram to-night from the mine," resumed Mr. Brackenbury, dropping his voice to a cautious whisper. "Something is amiss with it. I jumped into a Hansom —."

"Something amiss with it," interrupted Mark, cutting short the explanation, and his tone insensibly changing to one of dread; for that past summer's night, which had brought the telegram to Mr. Barker, recurred vividly to his mind. "Is it water?" he breathed.

Mr. Brackenbury nodded. "An irruption of water. I fear — you'll see, of course — but I fear the mine and its prosperity are at an end. Now, Mr. Cray, you repay me my money, and I'll hold my tongue. If this does not get about — and it shall not through me — you'll have time to negotiate some of your shares in the market to-morrow morning, and put something in your pocket before the disaster gets wind. I only want to secure myself. Trifling as the sum of two hundred pounds may seem to you, its loss to me would be utter ruin."

Mark felt bewildered. "And if I do not give you the two hundred pounds to-night, what then?"

"Then I go out with the dawn of morning, and publish the

failure of the mine to the City. I'll publish it to-night. But you'll not drive me to that, Mr. Cray. I don't want to harm you; I have said it; but my money I must have. It would not be pleasant for me to proclaim that there has already been one irruption of water into the mine, which you and Barker kept secret. I happen to know so much; and that the shares were sold to me *after* it, as I daresay shares have been sold to others. Perhaps the public might look on that as a sort of fraud. *I* do; for I consider a mine never is safe, once the water has been in it."

Mark paused. "It is strange that news of this should have come to you to-night and not to me."

"Not at all," said Mr. Brackenbury. "I am having the mine watched. It is only lately that I heard about that first irruption of water: I did not like it; and as I happen to have a friend down there, I got him to be on the look-out."

"Is it any one connected with the mine?" asked Mark, sharply.

"Yes, it is; no one else could do it. But that's of no consequence. I had a telegram from him to-night —."

"Will you let me see it?" interrupted Mark.

"I did not bring it with me. It told me that the water was flowing into the mine; *flowing*, mind; and it added these words, 'Not known here yet.' I infer, therefore, that the men had left the mine for the night, that the mischief will not be generally known there until the morning, and consequently cannot be known here. You will have time to save something."

Mark felt as if water were flowing over him. He stood there under the gas burner — the servant had only lighted one — a picture of perplexity, his face blank, his hand running restlessly through his hair, after his old restless manner, the diamond studs in his shirt sparkling and gleaming. All this sounded as though some treason, some treachery, were at

work. If this man could get news up, he and Barker ought to have got it.

A knock at the door. It opened about an inch, and Caroline's voice was heard.

"Mark, we *must* go. We are keeping the dinner waiting." And Mark was turning towards her, when Mr. Brackenbury silently caught him by the arm, and spoke in a whisper.

"No! Not until you have given me my money."

"Allow me to say a word to my wife," said Mark, haughtily. "I will return to you in an instant."

Caroline stood there with questioning eyes and a rebellious face. Mark shut the door while he spoke to her.

"You must go on alone, my dear. I can't come yet. I'll join you later in the evening."

"Mark! What's that for?"

"Hush! This gentleman has come up on business from the City, and I must attend to him," whispered Mark. "I'll get rid of him as soon as I can."

He was hurrying her out to the carriage as he spoke, and he placed her in it, she yielding to his strong will in her bewilderment. Once seated in it then she spoke.

"But, Mark, why should he come on business *now*? What is the business?"

"Oh, it has to do with the Great Wheal Bang," said Mark, carelessly. "It's all right: only I can't get away just at the minute. I won't be long. They are not to wait dinner, mind."

The carriage drove away, and Mark returned in-doors. His unwelcome visitor stood in the same place, apparently not having stirred hand or foot.

"How am I to know whether this news you have brought is true?" was Mark's first question. And Mr. Brackenbury looked at him for a minute before replying to it.

"I don't altogether take you, Mr. Cray. You cannot think I should knowingly bring you a false report; my character is too well respected in the City for you to fear that: and you may rely upon it, unhappily, that there's no mistake in the tidings forwarded to me."

"Well — allowing that it shall prove to be true — why can't you take your shares into the market and realise to-morrow morning, as well as coming to me for the money to-night?"

"Because I am not sure that I could realise!" was the frank response. "I don't suppose the intelligence will be public by that time; I don't think it will: but I cannot answer for it that it won't. You must give me the money, Mr. Cray."

Mark took an instant's gloomy counsel with himself. Might he dare to defy this man, and refuse his demands? He feared not. Mark was no more scrupulous than are some other shareholders we have read of, and the chance of realising something in the morning, to pit against the utter ruin that seemed to be impending, was not to be forfeited rashly. But how was he to pay the money? He had not two hundred shillings in the house, let alone two hundred pounds.

"I can't give it you to-night," said Mark, "I have not got it to give."

"I must and will have it," was the resolute answer. "I daresay you can go out and get it somewhere: fifty people would be glad to lend *you* money. I shall stay here until I have it. And if you deem me scant of courtesy to-night, Mr. Cray, you may set it down to the sore feeling in my mind at the circumstances under which the shares were sold to me. I'd never have touched them had I suspected water had been already in the mine."

"That's talking nonsense," said Mark, in his irritation. "The mine was as sound and as safe after the water had been

in it, as it was before. It was nothing more than a threatening; nothing to hurt."

"A threatening; just so. Well, it is of no use to waste time squabbling over terms now. That will do no good."

Mr. Brackenbury was right. It certainly would do no good. Mark went out, leaving him there, for he refused to stir, and, not seeing a cab, ran full speed to Mr. Barker's lodgings in Piccadilly. A Hansom could not have gone quicker. It was not that he hoped Mr. Barker would supply the two hundred pounds; that gentleman was as short of ready cash as himself; but Mark was burning with impatience to impart the disastrous news, and to hear whether Barker had had intelligence of it.

Disappointment. When Mark, panting, breathless, excited, seized the bell of Mr. Barker's house and rang a peal that frightened the street, he was told that Mr. Barker was not within. He had gone out in the afternoon: the servant did not know where.

"Has any telegram come up from Wales to-night?" gasped Mark.

"Telegram, sir? No sir; nothing at all has come to-night, neither letter nor anything."

"I'll be back in a short while," said Mark. "If Mr. Barker returns, tell him to wait in for me. It is of the very utmost importance that I should see him."

He turned away, jumped into a cab that was passing, and ordered it to drive to Parliament Street. The two hundred pounds he *must* get somehow, and he knew nobody he could apply to at the pinch, save Oswald.

Mark was not the only visitor to Oswald Cray that night. He had been sitting alone, after his dinner, very deep in deliberation, when Benn came up showing in a gentleman. It proved to be Henry Oswald.

They had not met since the funeral of Lady Oswald twelve months before, and at the first moment Oswald scarcely knew him. Henry Oswald was a cordial-mannered man. He had not inherited the cold heart and the haughty bearing so characteristic of the Oswalds of Thorndyke; and he grasped Oswald's hand warmly.

"I have been out of England nearly ever since we met, Oswald — I am sure you will let me call you so, we are near relatives — or I should have sought to improve the acquaintance begun at that short meeting. I want you to be friendly with me. I know how wrong has been the estrangement, and what cause you have to hate us; but surely you and I can afford to do away with the prejudice that has kept you from Thorndyke, and Thorndyke from you."

Oswald saw how genuine were the words, how earnest the wish imparted in them; and from that moment his "prejudice" went out of him, as far as Henry Oswald was concerned, and his eye lighted up with an earnest of the future friendship. He had liked Henry Oswald at that first meeting; he liked him still.

They sat together, talking of the days gone by, when they two were unconscious children. Of Oswald's mother; of the conduct of her family towards her; of the insensate folly — it was his son called it so — that still estranged Sir Philip from Oswald Cray. They talked freely and fully as though they had been intimate for years — far more confidentially than Oswald had ever talked to his half-brother.

"I shall be *proud* of your friendship, Oswald," cried the young man, warmly; "if that's not an ominous word for one of us. But I fancy you inherit the family failing far more than I. You will be one of the world's great men yet, making yourself a name that the best might envy."

Oswald laughed. "If the world envies those who work hard, then it may envy me."

"I can tell you what, Oswald. If work's not envied in these days, it is honoured. In the old days of darkness — I'm sure I can call them so, in comparison with these — it was such as I who were envied. The man born with a silver spoon in his mouth, who need do nothing his whole life long but sit down in idleness and enjoy his title and fortune, and be clothed in purple and fine linen and fare sumptuously every day — he got the honour then. *Now* the man of industry and talent is bowed down to, he who labours onwards and upwards to use and improve the good gifts bestowed upon him by God. It may be wrong to say it, but I do say it in all sincerity, that I, Henry Oswald, born to my baronetcy, envy you, Oswald Cray, born to work."

From one subject they went to another. In talking of the Cray family, they spoke of Mark, and from Mark the transition to the Great Wheal Bang Company was easy. Henry Oswald had heard and read of its promise, and he now asked Oswald's opinion of its stability. He had a few hundreds to spare, for he had not been an extravagant man, and felt inclined to embark them in the Great Wheal Bang. Oswald advised his doing so. He himself had embarked all his saved cash in it, a thousand pounds, and he thought he had done well.

"Then I'll see about it to-morrow," decided Henry Oswald; "and get it completed before I go down to Thorn-dyke."

He departed soon, for he was engaged out that evening, and Oswald resumed the train of thought which his entrance had interrupted. The *deliberation* it may be said. He was pondering a grave question: Should he not despatch Frank Allister to Spain in place of himself? Allister was equally

capable; and two or three years' residence in that climate might renovate him for life. It would be a great sacrifice for him, Oswald; a sacrifice, in some degree, of name and fame, and of pecuniary benefit; but he was a conscientious man, very different from the generality of business men who seek their own elevation, no matter who is left behind. Oswald as a child had learnt the good wholesome doctrine of doing to others as we would be done by: and he *carried it out practically in life*, content to leave the issue with God. How many of us can say as much?

A few minutes' earnest thought, and he raised his head with a clear countenance. The decision was made.

"Allister shall go," he said, half aloud. "Should he get ill again in this wretched climate next winter, and die, I should have it on my conscience for ever. It will be a sacrifice for me: but how can I put my advancement against his life? I ought not, and I will not."

The words had scarcely left his lips when Mark came in. Not Mark as we saw him just now, troubled, eager, panting; but Mark all coolness and smiles. A little hurried, perhaps, but that was nothing.

He had come to ask Oswald a favour. Would he accommodate him with a cheque for two hundred pounds until the banks opened in the morning. A gentleman, to whom was owing that sum on account of the Great Wheal Bang, had urgent need of it that very night, and had come bothering him, Mark, for it. If Oswald would accommodate him, he, Mark, should feel very much obliged, and would return it in the morning with many thanks.

"I have not got as much of my own," said Oswald.

"But you can give me a cheque of the firm's, can't you?" returned Mark, playing carelessly with his diamond studs.

Oswald did not much like this suggestion, and hesitated. Mark spoke again.

"It will be rendering me the greatest possible service, Oswald. The fellow has to leave town, or something, by one of the night trains. You shall have it back the first thing in the morning."

"You are sure that I shall, Mark?"

"Sure!" echoed Mark, opening his small grey eyes very wide in surprise. "Of course I am sure. Do you think I should forget to bring it you? Let me have it at once, there's a good brother. Carine will think I am never coming; we have to go to two parties to-night."

Oswald wrote the cheque and gave it him. It was a cheque of the firm: "Bracknell, Street, and Oswald Cray:" for Oswald's name appeared now.

And Mr. Mark carried it off with him. "There's a good brother," indeed! I wonder how he slept that night!

CHAPTER XV.

Commotion.

WITH the wing of the dawn — that is, with the wing of the dawn for business in London — Mark Cray was at the offices in the City. Barker was there before him, and started forward to meet him as he entered. Mark had not succeeded in seeing Barker the previous night.

"Cray, it's all up. I'm afraid it's all up."

"Have you heard from Wales?"

"I got a telegram this morning. There's an irruption of water, in earnest this time. It's flowing in like so many pumps. Look here."

Mark's hands shook as he laid hold of the telegram. "I wasn't in bed till three o'clock," said he, as if he would give

an excuse for the signs of agitation. But though he tried to account for his shaking hands, he could not for his scared face.

Yes, Mr. Barker was no doubt right: it was "all up" with the Great Wheal Bang. Mark and he stood alone over the table in the board-room: in consultation as to what they could do, and what they might do.

Might they dare — allowing that the public still reposed in happy security — to take some shares into the market, and secure themselves something out of the wreck? Barker was all for doing it; at any rate for *trying* it — "whether it would work," he said. Mark hung back in indecision: he thought there might be after-consequences. He told Barker the episode of Mr. Brackenbury's visit, and of his satisfying that gentleman with the cheque of Bracknell, Street, and Oswald Cray, which cheque was no doubt cashed by that time.

"Mean old idiot!" apostrophised Mr. Barker. "That's always the way with those petty people. They'll make more fuss over their paltry hundred pounds or two, than others do over thousands. I'd not have paid him, Mark."

"I couldn't help it," said Mark. "You should have seen the work he made. Besides, if I had not, he'd have proclaimed the thing from one end of London to another."

"Well, about these shares," said Barker. "We must make as much as ever we can. Will you go, or shall I?"

"Perhaps it's known already," returned Mark, dubiously.

"Perhaps it isn't. Brackenbury gave you his word that he'd keep quiet, and who else is likely to know it? Letters *can't* get here till the afternoon post, and nobody at the mine would make it their business to telegraph up."

Mark stood in restless indecision. When annoyed, he was fidgety to a degree; could not be still. Perhaps he had inherited his mother's temperament. He pushed back his

hair incessantly; he fingered nervously the diamond studs in his shirt. Mark was not in the habit of wearing those studs by day, or the curiously fine embroidery they were adorning. Whether, in his confusion of faculties, he had put in the studs that morning, or had absently retired to rest in his shirt the previous night, studs and all, must be left to conjecture.

"Look here, Barker," said he. "If news had not come to *us* of the disaster, to you and to me, I'd willingly have taken every share we possess into the market, and got the money for them down, if I could. But the news *has* come: and I don't think it would do."

"Who's to know it has come?" asked Barker.

"Well, things do often come out, you know; they nearly always do; especially if they are not wanted to. Perhaps the telegraph office could be brought up to prove it, or something of that."

"Well?" said Barker.

"Well," repeated Mark. "It mightn't do."

"Oh, bother, Cray! We must do it. We must stand out through thick and thin afterwards that the message never reached us. I could; and you are safe, for you have not had one at all. Look at our position. We *must* realise. Of course we can't attempt to negotiate many shares; that would betray us; but a few we might, and must. We must, for our own sakes; we can't stand naked, without a penny to fall back upon."

Mark still hesitated. "I'd have done it with all the pleasure in life, but for this telegram," he reiterated. "For one thing, Oswald would never forgive me; my name's the same as his, you know; and I shall have to face him over this two hundred pounds: that will be bad enough. And there's my mother. And my wife, Barker; you forget her."

"I don't forget her. I am thinking of her," was Mr.

Barker's answer. "It's for her sake, as much as ours, that you ought to secure a little ready money. You'll want it. I know that much, for I have been down in luck before."

Mark looked irresolute, and pitiably gloomy. "I don't see my way clear," he resumed, after a pause. "Let's put the thing into plain black and white. I go out, and sell some shares, and get the money paid down for them, and pocket it. An hour afterwards the news spreads that the mine's destroyed, and the shares are consequently worthless. Well, Barker, my belief is, that they could proceed against me criminally for disposing of those shares —"

"Not if you did not know the mine was wrong when you took them into the market."

"Nonsense," returned Mark, irritably, "they'd be sure to know it. I tell you it would be safe to come out by hook or by crook. They'd call it felony, or swindling, or some such ugly name. Do you suppose I am going to put my head into that noose? I was born a gentleman."

"And do you suppose I wish either of us to do it?" retorted Barker. "I shouldn't be such a fool. I never go into a thing unless I know I can fight my way out of it. I shall take a few shares into the market, and feel my way. I shall sell them for money, if I can; and you shall share it, Mark. I suppose you won't object to that."

No, certainly Mark would have no objection to that.

"I did not hear of the disaster until later, you know," said Barker, winking. "News of it came up to us by the afternoon post. If they do find out about the telegram, why, I never opened it. Nobody saw me open it," added Barker, with satisfaction. "I have had so many up from the mine at my lodgings, that the servants sign and put them in my sitting-room as a matter of course. This one was put there this morning, and I found it when I came down, but nobody was

in the room. Oh, it will be all right. And I say, Mark, if —”

Mr. Barker's smooth projects were stopped. Absorbed in their conversation, he and Mark had alike failed to notice a gradually gathering hum in the street outside. A very gentle, almost imperceptible hum at first, but increasing to a commotion now. With one bound they reached the window.

A concourse of people, their numbers being augmented every moment, had assembled beneath. They were waiting for the opening of the offices of the Great Wheal Bang at ten o'clock. And the hour was almost on the point of striking.

“It's all up,” shouted Barker in Mark's ear. “The news is abroad, and they have heard of it. Look at their faces!”

The faces were worth looking at, though not as a pleasant sight. Anger, rage, disappointment, above all, *impatience*, were depicted there. The impatience of a wolf waiting to spring upon its prey. One of the faces unluckily turned its gaze upwards, and caught sight of Barker's. Barker saw it; he had not been quick enough in drawing away from the window.

“They'll not be kept out now, doors or no doors,” said he quietly to Mark.

Mr. Barker was right. Ere the words had died away upon his lips, a sound as if the walls of the house were being beaten in, ensued. The bells commenced a perpetual peal, the knocker knocked incessantly, the doors were pushed and kicked and thumped. In the midst of it rose the sound of human voices in a roar: disjointed words distinguishable amidst the tumult. “Let us in! Come out to us!”

Mr. Barker advanced to the stairs and leaned over the balustrades. “Williams,” he called out to an attendant official below, “you can open the doors. The gentlemen may come up.”

It was curious to note the difference in the two men. Barker was as cool as a cucumber; self-possessed as ever he had been in his life; ready to make the best of everything, and quite equal to the emergency. Mark Cray on the contrary seemed to have parted alike with his wits and his nerves. Not more completely did he lose his presence of mind in that long past evening which had been so fatal to Lady Oswald. His hands shook as with terror; his face was white as death.

"Will they pull us to pieces, Barker?"

"Pooh!" said Barker, with a laugh at the evident tremor. "What has taken you, Mark? Let them rave on a bit without answering, and they'll calm down. Put *that* in your pocket," he continued. "It will be a trifle to fall back upon."

He had touched the diamond ring that glittered on Mark Cray's finger. Mark obeyed like a child. He took it from his hand and thrust it into his waistcoat pocket; next he buttoned his coat, some vague feeling perhaps prompting him to hide the studs; but he did it all mechanically, as one not conscious of his actions. Terror was holding its sway over him.

"Why should they be excited against us? Heaven knows we have not intentionally wronged them."

"That's just the question I shall ask them myself when they are cool enough to listen to it," rejoined Barker, with a gay air. "Now then comes the tug of war."

In they came, thick and threefold, dashing up the stairs and pouring into the room like so many bees. And then it was found that Mark's apprehensions had been somewhat premature. For these shareholders had come flowing to the offices not so much to abuse the projectors of the company, as to inquire the true particulars of the disaster. The news had gone forth in a whisper — and to this hour neither Mark

nor Barker knows how, or through whom, it had oozed out — but that whisper was vague and uncertain. Naturally, those interested flew to the offices for better information. Was the damage of great extent? and would the mine and the company stand it?

Barker was of course all suavity. He treated the matter more as a joke than anything else, making light of it altogether. An irruption of water? well, perhaps a little drop had got in, but they must wait for the afternoon's post. It would be all right.

He looked round for Mark, hoping that gentleman's face would not arouse suspicion; but he could not see him. Mark, as Barker learnt afterwards, had contrived to escape from the room as the throng entered, and got into the street unnoticed, and leaped into a cab. Mark was beside himself that morning.

The unfortunate news spread from one end of London to the other. It was carried to Oswald Cray; but the day was advancing then. "The Great Wheal Bang Company had exploded, and there was a run upon the office." Oswald was startled; and betook himself at once to the premises, as the rest had done. On his way, he called in upon Henry Oswald, and spoke a word of caution.

"It may be a false rumour," said he; "I hope it is. But don't do anything in the shares until you know."

A false rumour! When Oswald reached the offices, he found it all too true a one. The secretary to the company, without meaning to do ill — indeed he had let it out in his lamentation — had unwittingly disclosed the fact of the previous irruption of water in the summer: and the excited crowd were going wild with anger. Many of them had bought their shares at a period subsequent to that.

Oswald heard this, and went to Mr. Barker in the board-

room. That gentleman, rather heated certainly, but with unchanged suavity of demeanour, was still doing his best to reassure everybody. Oswald drew him aside.

"What a dreadful thing this is! What is the real truth of it?"

"Hush!" interrupted Mr. Barker. "No need to tell the worst to them. You are one of us. I'm afraid it is all up with the mine; but we will keep it from them as long as we can. Any way, it's no fault of ours."

"What is it that they are saying about an irruption of water having occurred in the summer?"

"Well, so it did," answered Mr. Barker, whose past few hours' temporising with the crowd caused him perhaps to throw off reserve to Mr. Oswald Cray as a welcome relief. "But it wasn't much, that; and we succeeded in keeping it dark."

"Did Mark know of it?"

"Mark know of it!" rejoined Barker; "of course he knew of it. What should hinder him? Why, the telegram bringing the news was given me at Mark's house; and, by the way, you were present, I remember. It was the evening that old doctor in the yellow trousers was there, with his two frights of daughters."

The scene rose as in a mirror before Oswald's memory. Dr. Ford and his daughters, Miss Davenal and Sara, Caroline Cray in her silks and her beauty. He remembered the telegram, he remembered that it appeared to disturb both Barker and Mark; and he remembered Mark's denial to him that anything was amiss with the mine.

"I do recollect it," he said aloud. "It struck me — perhaps it was rather singular it should do so — that something was wrong. Mark declared to me that it was not so."

The words seemed to tickle Barker uncommonly.

"Ah," said he, laughing, "Mark told me of it, and how he turned you off the scent. You'd not have put your thousand into it, perhaps, had you known of the water."

"Perhaps not," quietly replied Oswald. "And my thousand was wanted, I suppose."

"Law! you don't know the money that's been wanted," was the response. "And that irruption of water, slight as it was, made the demand for it worse. The mine has sucked it in like a sponge."

Oswald made no answering remark. "I suppose this irruption is worse than that?" he presently observed.

"Indeed I fear this is another thing altogether — ruin. But we don't know anything certain until the post comes in this afternoon. We have had no letter yet."

"How did the news of it come to you?"

"By telegram. But the first news came to Mark; in an odd manner, too. A curmudgeon of a share-holder, old Brackenbury, went up yesterday evening to Mark just as he was going out to dinner with his wife, and insisted upon his paltry money, only two hundred pounds, being returned to him. He was inclined to be nasty; and if Mark had not satisfied him, he'd have gone over London proclaiming that the mine was overflowing with water. The odd thing is, who could have telegraphed the news to him. We must have a traitor in the camp. Mark told me — oh, ah," broke off Mr. Barker, interrupting himself as recollection flashed upon him — "I think he got the two hundred from you."

"And Mark knew the mine was then ruined!" returned Oswald, drawing in his lips, but not losing his calm equanimity.

"Brackenbury *said* it was. He didn't know it otherwise. Brackenbury — Halloo! what's that?"

It was a shout in the street. A shout composed of roars,

and hisses, and groans. Drawing up to the door of the offices, was the handsome carriage of Mark Cray; and the crowd had turned their indignation upon it.

One look, one glimpse of the white and terror-stricken faces of its inmates, and Oswald Cray bounded down the stairs. They were the faces of Mrs. Cray and Sara Davenal.

What could have brought them there?

CHAPTER XVI.

Day-Dreams rudely interrupted.

BEFORE a costly breakfast service of Sèvres porcelain with its adjuncts of glittering silver, on the morning subsequent to the visit of Mr. Brackenbury, had sat Caroline Cray, in a charming morning robe of white muslin and blue ribbons, with what she would have called a *coiffure*, all blue ribbons and white lace, on her silky hair. A stranger, taking a bird's-eye view of the scene, of the elegant room, the expensive accessories, the *recherché* attire of its mistress, would have concluded that there was no lack of means, that the income supporting all this must at least be to the extent of some thousands a year.

In truth Mark Cray and his wife were a practical illustration of that homely but expressive saying which must be so familiar to you all; *they had begun at the wrong end of the ladder*. When fortune has come; when it is actually realised, in the hands, then the top of the ladder, comprising its Sèvres porcelain and other costs in accordance, may be safe and consistent, but if we *begin* there without first climbing to it, too many of us have an inconvenient fashion of slipping down again. The furniture surrounding Caroline Cray was of the most beautiful design, the most costly nature; the lace on that morning robe, on that pretty "coiffure" would make a

hole in a £20 bank-note, the silver ornaments on the table were fit for the first palace in the land, and Mr. and Mrs. Cray had got these things about them — and a great deal more besides which I have not time to tell you of — anticipatory of the fortune that was *to be* theirs; not that already *was*. And now their footing on that high ladder was beginning to tremble: just as that of the milkmaid did when she sent the milk out of her milkpails, and so destroyed her dreams.

Caroline sat at her late breakfast, toying with a fashionable newspaper — that is, one giving notice of the doings of the fashionable world — sipping her coffee, flirting with some delicate bits of buttered roll, casting frequent glances at the mirror opposite to her, in whose polished plate was reflected that pretty face, which in her pardonable vanity she believed had not its compeer. All unconscious was she of that turbulent scene, then being enacted in the city; of the fact that her husband was at that moment finding his way to her in a cab, into which he had jumped to hide himself in abject fear and dismay. Caroline had slept sound and late after her night's gaiety, and awoke in the morning to find her husband had gone out.

The French clock behind her struck eleven, and she finished her breakfast quickly, and began thinking over her plans for the day. Some excursion into the country had been spoken of for the afternoon, and now Mark was gone she was at an uncertainty. Mrs. Cray tapped her pretty foot in petulance on the carpet, and felt exceedingly angry with the tiresome stranger who had disturbed her husband when he was dressing on the previous evening, and kept him from going out with her to dinner.

"How long did that gentleman stop here last night, George?" she suddenly asked of the servant who was re-

moving the breakfast things. "Mr. — what was the name? Brackenbury, I think."

"He stopped a good while, ma'am. I think it was between nine and ten when he left."

"What a shame! Keeping Mr. Cray all that while. I wonder he stayed with him! *I* wouldn't. I'd make people come to me in business hours, if I were Mark."

She sat on, after the departure of the breakfast things, leaning back in an easy chair and turning carelessly the leaves of a new novel, those that would open, for she did not exert herself to cut them. A very listless mood was she in that morning, tired and out of sorts. By and by her maid came in to ask about some alteration that was to be made in a dress, and Caroline told her to bring the dress to her.

That a little aroused her. It was a beautiful evening dress of flowered silk, and she stood over the table, where the maid laid it, consulting with her about some change in the colour of the trimmings. Becoming absorbed in this, she scarcely noticed that some one had come into the hall and opened the door of the room. Some expression in the maid's countenance as she looked up, caught her attention, and she turned quickly round.

Mark was there, glancing into the room. Mark with a white aspect and a scared, dreamy look on his face. Before Caroline had time to question, in fact almost before she looked, he was gone and had closed the door again. So quiet had been the movement, so transient the vision, that Caroline spoke in her surprise.

"Was not that your master?"

"Yes, ma'am. Something was the matter, I think. He looked ill."

"I will go and see. Mind, Long, I'll decide upon pink. It is the prettiest colour."

"Very well, ma'am. As you please, of course. I only think pink won't go so well with the dress as violet."

"I tell you, Long, that violet *will not* light up. You know it won't, without my having to reiterate it over to you. No colour lights up so bad as violet. Pink: and let the ruchings be very full and handsome."

Speaking the last words in a peremptory tone, she went in search of Mark. He was standing upright in the dining-room, in the midst of its floor, looking more like a man lost, than a man in his composed senses.

"Mark, what's the matter?"

He turned to his wife, — he had been undecided whether to tell her or not. It was a question he debated with himself on his way down: that is, it had been floating through his mind in a sort of under-current. To concentrate his thoughts deliberately upon one point sufficiently to debate it, was that day beyond the power of Mark Cray.

Mark's true disposition was showing itself now. Vacillating and unstable by nature, utterly deficient in that moral courage which meets an evil when it comes, and looks it steadily in the face to see how it may be best dealt with, the blow of the morning had taken away what little sense Mark possessed. He was as a frightened child; a ship without a rudder; he was utterly unable to distinguish what his proper course ought to be; he did not know where to go or what to do: his chief thought was, to get away from the torrent that had broken loose. He must hide himself from the storm, but he could not face it.

When he jumped into the cab, and the driver had said, "Where to, sir?" he gave his home in Grosvenor Place in answer, simply because he could not think of another direction to give in that bewildering moment: so the cab drove on. But Mark did not want to go to Grosvenor Place. He had

nothing to get from there; he had no business there, and a feeling came over him that he had rather not meet his wife just then. He wanted to hide himself and his bewildered mind and his scared face in some nook of remote shelter, far from the haunts of men, where that remorseless crowd, just escaped from, would not pounce upon him. Mark had not given himself time to ascertain that their disposition was pacificatory: he was wondering, rather, whether they had yet pulled the offices down. Neither Mark Cray nor Caroline was fitted to encounter the storms of life. So long as the sailing was smooth, it was well; but when the waves arose, rough and turbulent, the one proved physically, the other morally, unable to breast them.

Mark stopped the cab as it was turning into Grosvenor Place; some vague feeling prompting him that it might be safer to steal quietly into his home than to dash up to it in a cab. The tidings had perhaps travelled far and wide, and people might be already there, as well as at the offices. Mark was half determined to make the best of his way at once to the scene of the Great Wheal Bang itself, the mine; and see with his own eyes whether things were so bad that they could not be mended. At least he should be away from his furious enemies in London. One, more under the influence of reason than Mark Cray, might have thought it well to ascertain whether those enemies were so furious, before running from them. When a man of no moral courage loses his presence of mind, he merits pity perhaps rather than condemnation.

“Mark, what’s the matter?”

With her actual presence before him, with the pointed question on her lips, Mark Cray’s indecision went completely out. He could no more have told her the truth at that moment, that the golden prospects so implicitly believed in had turned to ruin, and the offices yonder were being besieged by

noisy shareholders, than he could have told it to the besiegers themselves.

"The matter?" repeated Mark, at a loss for any other answer.

"You look as if something were the matter, Mark. And what have you come back for?"

"Oh, I left some papers at home," answered Mark, speaking as carelessly as he could. "There's nothing the matter with me. The fellow drove fast, that's all. I gave him an extra sixpence."

Perhaps Caroline did not deem this communication particularly relevant to the subject. "What made you go away so early, Mark?" she asked. "You never settled anything about Hendon to-day?"

"Well, I don't think I can go," said Mark. "I — I'll see later. Hark!"

Mark's "hark" was spoken in echo to a thundering knock at the door. A knock and a ring enough to shake the house down. He looked round at the walls for a moment as if he wanted to make a dash into them; he stepped towards the window, hesitated, and drew away again; finally he opened the door to escape, but too late, for voices were already in the hall. Caroline looked at her husband in wondering dismay.

"Mark, what has come to you?"

"Hush!" whispered Mark, the perspiration welling up to his forehead, as he bent his head to catch the sound from those voices. "Hark! hush!"

"Is Mr. Cray at home?"

"No, sir. He went to the city early this morning."

How Mark Cray blessed his servant for the unconscious mistake, he alone could tell. The man had not seen his master come in, and had no idea he was in the house.

"Gone to the City, is he? Are you sure?"

"Quite sure, sir."

A pause. Mark's heart was beating.

"What time will he be home?"

"I don't know, sir."

Another pause. "I suppose Mr. Barker's not here?"

"Mr. Barker? O dear no, sir."

And that was followed by the closing of the hall-door. Mark Cray gave a great gasp of relief, and went upstairs to his own room.

He did not stay there above a minute. Caroline — she remembered it afterwards — heard a drawer or two opened and shut. She had been following him, but was momentarily detained by a question from her maid, who was coming out of the breakfast-room with the dress upon her arm. Caroline stopped while she answered it, and in going up the stairs she met Mark coming down.

"Who was that at the door, Mark? Did you think it was any one in particular?"

"I don't know who it was."

"You seemed alarmed. Or annoyed."

"Well," returned Mark, speaking rather fast, "and it is annoying to have business fellows coming after me to my house. Why can't they go to the offices?"

"To be sure," said Caroline, reassured. "I'd not see a soul here, if I were you."

He had been walking on towards the hall door while he spoke. But ere he had well reached it, he turned, and drew his wife into one of the rooms.

"Look here, Caroline: I'm not sure but I shall have to go down to the mines to-night. If so, it is just possible I may not be able to come here first. So you won't be alarmed if you don't see me home."

"What a hurry you must be in!" exclaimed Caroline. "Not come home first!"

"But if I do go, mind, it will be on a little private matter that I don't want known," he continued, taking no notice of the remark. "So, if anybody should ask where I am, just answer that you can't tell, but that I shall be back in a day or two. Do you understand, Carine?"

"Quite well. But, Mark, you will come home first, won't you?"

"I only tell you this in case I don't come," he answered evasively. "I have a good deal to do to-day. Good-bye, Carine?"

"But about Hendon?" she interrupted.

"Hendon? Oh, I am quite sure I shan't have time for Hendon to-day. If you don't like to go without me, we must put it off for a day or two."

He stooped to kiss her. Opening the hall door, he stood on the steps, looking right and left; carelessly, as it seemed; in reality, cautiously. Very timorous was Mark Cray in that hour; he did not like that people should have hunted him to his very home. Then he turned to the Victoria Station, perhaps as the nearest point of refuge. He would make his way to Wales, to the mine, as straightly and speedily as he could, consistent with precaution.

Mark had been gone the best part of an hour, and it was hard upon mid-day. His wife was just deliberating whether to go shopping in the afternoon, or make calls, or pay a visit to the empty park, or take a drive out of town; which way, in short, would be the least tedious of killing the precious time that God had given her, when she was aroused by a formidable summons at the door, and a noise as of many steps and voices besieging the hall.

What next took place, Caroline never clearly remembered.

Confused recollections remained to her afterwards of angry demands for Mr. Cray, of indignant denials to the servant's assertion that his master was in the City; the hubbub was great, the voices were threatening. Caroline's first surprise was superseded by indignation; and that in its turn gave place to alarm.

You all know what it is to pour oil upon a spark of fire, previously ready to burst forth into a flame. When the Great Wheal Bang's shareholders had flocked to the Great Wheal Bang's offices that morning, they were on the balance, as may be said, between war and peace; somewhat uncertain in their own minds whether to treat Mark Cray and Mr. Barker as unfortunate fellow-sufferers with themselves, or to expend upon them their wrongs and their wrath. That mistake of the Great Wheal Bang's secretary — as alluded to in the last chapter — turned the scale. In his dismay and confusion he inadvertently referred to the former irruption of water, and the unlucky disclosure maddened the throng. They forthwith looked upon themselves as dreadfully injured people; in fact they jumped to the conclusion that the Great Wheal Bang itself was little better than a swindle; so apt are we all to rush into extremes. Barker did what he could to stem the torrent; but the crowd vociferously demanded to see Mark Cray. It was *he* they had known mostly in the affair, for Barker was usually in the mine. And, not finding Mark answer to their demands, some of them tore off on the spur of the moment in Hansom cabs to his residence.

Caroline stood the very image of dismay. She did not show herself; she was too much alarmed; she peeped from the half-closed dining-room door and listened, just as Mark had done a short while before. Confused words of "water" and "mine" and "swindle" and "ruin" saluted her ears; and

the demands for Mr. Cray became more threateningly imperative. Some movement of the door occurred; she staggered against it; and it was observed from the hall.

Perhaps it was only natural to the belligerents to conclude that Mark Cray was there. They pressed forward to the room; but upon seeing that the lady was its only occupant, the young and lovely lady in her gala morning dress and the roses chased from her cheeks by fear, they drew back and clustered outside it.

"What is it you want?" gasped Caroline from her trembling lips.

One of the foremost answered her. He was a gentleman, and he raised his hat, and made his tone as courteous as his sense of injury allowed. They were very sorry to disturb *her*, but they must see Mr. Cray. They had come to see him, and they would see him.

"I assure you that he is not here," said Caroline, her earnest voice carrying truth with it. "He has been gone some time."

"He was at the offices this morning, madam, and disappeared. We were told he had no doubt come home."

"It is true," she answered. "He went to the offices very early, and came home again about eleven o'clock for something he had forgotten, papers I think he said. He did not stay two minutes; he got them and went back again. What is it that is the matter?"

"Back to the offices?" they asked, disregarding the question.

"Yes, back to the offices. He said he must make haste, for he had a great deal to do to-day. I am sure you will find him there."

She had no suspicion that she was asserting what was not true. Whether they believed it or not — though most of them

did believe it — they had no resource but to act upon it. Filing out again, they jumped into the cabs, and rattled back at the rate of nine-and-twenty miles an hour.

Leaving Mrs. Cray in a grievous state of perplexity and of distress: for they had spoken of “ruin” as connected with the mine. She was one of those who cannot bear suspense; she had no patience; no endurance, not even for an hour. In a tumult of hurry and emotion, she had her carriage brought round, called for Sara Davenal, to whom, however, she did not tell what had taken place, and drove on to the city almost as fast as those cabs had driven, to get an explanation of Mark.

The cabs had arrived previously, and their occupants found they had been deceived. No Mark Cray was at the offices, or had been there since his first departure from them. They burst bounds, in tongue at any rate, and talked of warrants and prosecutions and various inconvenient things. Other shareholders joined in the general fury, and it may perhaps be excused to them that when the carriage of Mark Cray suddenly appeared in the general *melée*, they turned their rage upon it.

That is, they pressed round it and saluted it with reproaches not at all soft or complimentary. Possibly in the moment's blind anger, they did not see that Mark himself was not its occupant. They were, on the whole, men who knew how to behave themselves, and would have desisted, perhaps apologised, when they had had time and calmness to see that only ladies were there: but that time was not allowed them.

One came, with his tall strong form, his pale, resolute, haughty face, and pushed them right and left, as he laid his hand on the carriage door.

"Are you *men*?" he asked. "Don't you see that you are terrifying these ladies? Stand back. I had thought——"

"O, Oswald, save us! save us!" came the interrupting cry, as Caroline Cray caught his hand. "What is it all? what has happened?"

He got her out of the carriage and into some adjacent offices, whose friendly doors were opened to them. Sara followed, unmolested, and Oswald went back to rescue, if might be, the carriage. But the gentlemen had been a little recalled to common sense by the incident: and the carriage was no longer in danger. Smashing Mark Cray's carriage would not make good their losses, or bring forth him who was missing. Oswald returned to Mrs. Cray.

"It is all right again now," he said. "The carriage is waiting for you a little further off. Shall I take you to it?"

"But I want to go into the offices, Oswald," she feverishly rejoined. "I want to see Mark. I must see him."

"Mark is not at the offices. Neither would it be well that you should go there just now."

"Not at the offices! where is he then?"

"I don't know where he is. I should like to find him."

He spoke in a cold, proud, bitter tone, and it struck dismay to the heart of Mrs. Cray. Indeed, Oswald's frame of mind was one of the most intense bitterness. He had been plausibly defrauded out of his money; his pride, his sensitive honour, his innate justice, had been wounded to the core. All this disgrace Mark Cray had been earning for himself: Mark, his half-brother!

"But I must see Mark," she reiterated in a helpless manner. "Don't you know where I can go to find him, Oswald?"

"I do not indeed."

"I want to know what has happened. I heard them speak of ruin; of water in the mine. Can *you* tell me?"

"News has come up that an irruption of water has taken place. I find it is not the first: but the other, they say, was not serious."

"And this is?"

"I fear so."

"But what right have those men to be so angry, so excited against Mark? He did not let the water in."

Oswald made no answer. If Mark had treated those shareholders with the duplicity that he had treated him, they had certainly a very good right to be angry and excited.

Mrs. Cray turned towards the door in her restlessness to take a reconnoitring glimpse of the state of affairs outside. Mark might have come up! might be in the midst of the mob! Sara, who had waited for the opportunity, drew near to Oswald Cray, and spoke in a whisper.

"Is it ruin?"

"Irretrievable — as I believe," he answered, his voice unconsciously assuming a strange tenderness as he looked at her pale, sad face. "Ruin for Mark Cray, perhaps for many others."

And the words fell like a shock of ice on her heart. What would become of the engagement that she had made to repay the two hundred pounds to Mr. Wheatley from the money owing her by Mark?"

CHAPTER XVII.

The Evening of the Blow.

It was the peculiarity of Miss Bettina Davenal to be more especially deaf when suddenly surprised or annoyed. Possibly it is the same with other deaf people. Sara Davenal stood before her in her drawing-room striving to make her comprehend the state of affairs relative to the Great Wheal Bang; and not at first successfully. Miss Bettina had not understood why Mrs. Cray had driven round in hurried agitation that morning and carried off Sara by storm: Caroline would not explain why, and Sara could not. Sara had returned home now, willing to afford every explanation; indeed believing it to be her duty so to do; but Miss Bettina, offended at the morning's slight, was keeping her heart closed; and when *that* was shut, the ears would not open.

"*What* d'you say? You went up to the offices? I should like to know what took you and Caroline to the offices? Young ladies don't require to go to such places."

"She went to try to see Mark, aunt."

"Ugh!" growled Miss Bettina. "Mark told her, indeed! If Mark Cray told her to go down the mine amidst the lead, she'd do it. Doesn't he see enough of her at home?"

"She went to try to see Mark, Aunt Bettina," repeated Sara, more slowly. "I — I am afraid they are ruined."

"Serve them right," returned Miss Bettina, catching the last word, but attaching no importance to it.

"Some disastrous news has been received from Wales, from the mine. Caroline says a Mr. Brackenbury called in Grosvenor Place last night ——"

"Mr. who?"

"Mr. Brackenbury. She did not know then why he

called, but Mr. Oswald Cray has now told her that he brought the first news of it to Mark. It had come up to him by telegram."

Miss Bettina Davenal bent her ear. "He came up by telegram! What do you mean by that? Have they got a new invention that brings up people, pray? Why are you not more careful how you speak, Miss Sara Davenal?"

"I said the news came up by telegram, aunt. It came to Mr. Brackenbury; and that's why he called on Mark last night. At least, so Mr. Oswald Cray told Caroline. Caroline had been surprised or annoyed at his visit; she did not understand it; and she mentioned it to Mr. Oswald Cray."

Miss Bettina lifted her hands helplessly. "What's any Mr. Brackenbury to me? — or Oswald Cray either? I want to know why Caroline took you to those offices to-day?"

"I am trying to tell you, aunt," said poor Sara. "Mark went up to the offices early this morning, before Caroline was awake; he came home again about eleven, saying he had forgotten something, but Caroline thought his manner absent and strange. He left again; and soon after the house was invaded by quite a crowd of men, gentlemen, demanding to see him —"

"Had they got an organ with them!"

Miss Bettina's interruption took Sara rather aback. "An organ, aunt? I don't know what you mean."

"Not know what I mean!" was the wrathful answer. "Crowds don't collect round houses unless there's a cause; organs or monkeys, or some such nonsense. What did they collect there for?"

Sara bent her head lower and strove to speak with even more distinctness. "It was a crowd of gentlemen, aunt; gentlemen from the City; though perhaps I ought not to have said a crowd, but it was what Caroline called it to me.

They came down in Hansom cabs, she said, and they were fierce in their demands to see Mark, and they'd hardly go away again, and they said the mine was ruined. Caroline was alarmed, and she went up herself to try to see Mark, but she did not like to go alone, and came round for me."

The words were as a hopeless jumble in Miss Bettina's ear; their sense nowhere. "I wish you'd be clear," she said, tartly. "If you want to tell me a thing, tell it in a straightforward manner. Why do you mix up crowds and organs with it?"

"Dear aunt, I never said a word about an organ. The — mine — is — ruined," she added, almost out of heart with her task.

"What's ruined?" shrieked Miss Bettina.

"The mine. The Great Wheal Bang."

Miss Bettina heard this time. She had lived in expectation of the news ever since the Great Wheal Bang first jumped into existence. Nevertheless it scared her; and an expression of dismay sat on her refined features, as she turned them on Sara with a questioning gaze.

"I believe the water has got in. They say it is utter ruin. And Mark Cray can't be found."

"What has Mark Cray found?"

"*He* can't be found, aunt. He was not at the offices when we got there, and the shareholders — as I suppose the people were — attacked the carriage: some of them have sunk a great deal of money in the mine. There was no real danger, of course; but Mr. Oswald Cray got us out of it."

Miss Bettina stared hopelessly. "Oswald Cray got you out of the mine! What *are* you talking of?"

"Out of the carriage, aunt; not out of the mine. That's in Wales."

"Do you suppose I thought it was in London?" retorted

offended Miss Bettina. "You'll be obligingly informing me where London is, next. Where is Mark Cray?"

"No one seems to know. His wife does not; except that he said to her he might have to go down to Wales this evening, and she was not to mention it. She is in great uncertainty and distress."

"What's she in?"

"Uncertainty, distress," repeated Sara. "She is as frightened as a child. I fear she will not be a good one to bear misfortune. I went home with her and remained some time; it was that made me so late. When I came away she was growing very angry with Mark: she says he ought to have told her of it this morning."

"And so he ought," said Miss Bettina. "Ah! I never cordially approved that match for Caroline, and the doctor knew it. She'll see what he's made of now. You say you came in contact with the shareholders: what did they say?"

Sara hesitated. "They were saying very disagreeable things, Aunt Bettina."

"That's not telling me what they said."

"They talked of deceit and — and swindling. They seem dreadfully bitter against Mark Cray."

"Dreadfully what against him?"

"Bitter."

"Oh," said Miss Bettina. "Mark Cray's a fool in more ways than one; but they should blame themselves, not him. Mark told them the mine was of gold, I daresay; but it was their fault if they believed it. A man might come to me and say, If you will give me a ten-pound note I'll bring it you back to-morrow doubled, and if I fell into the trap I ought not to turn my anger on him. Mark Cray *believed* in the mine: those schemers are so sanguine."

Sara bent her head until her lips almost touched her aunt's

ear, and lowered her voice to a cautious tone: but somehow it was terribly distinct to Miss Bettina.

"Aunt, I fear it is not quite so straightforward as you think. There was an irruption of water in the summer — a slight one, I fancy — and Mark and Mr. Barker concealed it. It is this which makes the shareholders so angry, and they say — they say they can prosecute him for it."

"Who said this?" asked Miss Bettina, after a pause.

"I can hardly tell who. We heard a great deal of talking altogether. One gentleman came up to Mr. Oswald Cray as he was taking us to the carriage again, and asked him if he was not Mark's brother. Oswald replied that he was Mark's half-brother; and then the gentleman said harsh things, and Oswald could not stop him, and could not get us by."

Miss Bettina poured forth question upon question. Incensed as she had been against Mark Cray and his wife for the past months, much as she had blamed their folly, sharp as were her prophecies of the final results, perhaps this was worse than she had bargained for. She had looked for ruin, but not for criminal disgrace.

"And Mark can't be found, you say?" she asked, her tone a shrill one.

"No."

She sat down to the dinner-table, for the day had gone on to evening, despatching Neal for a fly while she ate a bit, and then she went out, taking Sara. "Grosvenor Place," she said to Neal. And that observant domestic knew by the compressed lips, the clasped hands, the rigid head, how inwardly flurried was his mistress.

They found Caroline in a state of emotion, bordering upon hysteria. Fear, anger, perplexity, and despair, succeeding each other so rapidly that her mood may have been said to savour of the whole at once. Poor Caroline Cray knew

nothing of either endurance or reticence; her anger against Mark was great at the present moment, and she gave way to it loudly.

"Where is he?" was the first pointed question of Miss Davenal.

"I don't know where he is. He might have trusted me. It's *not* his fault if the water has come into the mine, and he had no cause to go away; but if he had gone, he might have taken me. Barker has been down here in a dreadful passion, and says Mark was not a good fellow to steal a march on him and leave him alone all day to fight the battle with the shareholders. A hundred people, about, have been here after Mark, and it's a shame that I should be left to hear all the remarks."

"Is Oswald Cray with you?" asked Miss Bettina.

"Oh, my goodness, I don't suppose *he'll* come here again," returned poor Caroline, half beside herself. "I thought him cold and queer in his manner to-day. Barker says he is vexed at losing his thousand pounds; and that Mark got two hundred more from him last night after he knew the mine had gone. Oswald said nothing to me, but of course he is incensed at it."

Miss Davenal had been listening with her hand to her ear, and she heard pretty well. "Do you know the particulars of the calamity?" she asked. "Is the mine irretrievably ruined?"

"I don't know anything, except that I'm fit to go mad," she answered, beginning to sob like a petulant child.

In that one first moment of the blow, Miss Davenal was generous enough to spare reproaches for all the folly of the past, though she had plenty at her tongue's end. She had not sat down since she entered; she had stood rigid and upright; and when she went out to the fly she ordered it to Mr. Oswald Cray's.

"Tell the man to drive quickly," said Miss Bettina to Neal. "What do you say, Sara? Let you stop with Caroline? Caroline wants neither you nor me; I can see that. There'll be trouble over this."

Mrs. Cray had not chosen an inapt word when she said Oswald must be incensed against Mark. It was precisely Oswald's present state of feeling. He saw that the thousand pounds had been nothing but a stop-gap; not drawn from him for his own good and benefit, as Mark so largely boasted, but for Mark's own necessities. And as to the two hundred pounds of the previous night, the money of the firm—Oswald did boil over at the thought of that. Oh, why could not Mark have been upright and open! why could he not have gone to Oswald with the truth upon his lip, and said, Let me have this two hundred pounds in my dire necessity, and I will repay you when I can! Oswald was not the brother to refuse him.

Oswald had had a battle with himself. When he returned home after that scene in the city, feeling that his money, the twelve hundred pounds, was irretrievably lost, he sat down and thought. Should he cancel the offer made to Frank Allister to go out to Spain, and take the appointment himself, as at first intended? Was he justified in foregoing it, under this unexpected loss? The same considerations swayed him now as previously; his own interest versus Frank's health, perhaps life; but how weighty a balance was now thrown into his own scale.

If ever Oswald had need of a better guidance than his own, he had need now. And he was conscious of it. He had many failings, as we all have; and his pride often stood in his way; but he had one great and good gift—a conscience that was ever prompting him on the upward way.

"No, I will not hesitate," he said to himself. "The necessity for Allister's going remains the same, and he shall go."

I must overget this other loss as I best can, though it may be years first, but I'll not set my own interest against Allister's life."

And so Frank Allister and his sister received no countermand, and they proceeded to Mr. Oswald Cray's that evening, to talk over arrangements, as it had been decided they should; and they never knew the sacrifice that had been made for them, or had the least suspicion that Mr. Oswald Cray had yielded up the appointment.

When Miss Davenal and Sara arrived, Mrs. Benn received them. That errant husband of hers, and valued servant of the firm, was out again. This was *not* Mrs. Benn's cleaning day; but any little extra duty, though it was but the receiving a visitor at unusual hours, put her out excessively; and it was not usual for a levee of ladies to attend the house in an evening. She appeared at the door with the ordinary crusty face and a candle in her hand.

"Is Mr. Oswald Cray at home?" was Neal's demand.

"Yes he is," returned Mrs. Benn, speaking as if the question injured her very much indeed.

Neal stepped back to the fly, and opened the door for the ladies to alight. Mrs. Benn stared at the proceedings with all her eyes.

"Well, if this don't bang everything!" she ejaculated, partly to herself, partly to the street. "If he was agoing to have a party to-night, he might have told me, I think. And that there Benn to go out, and never light the hall-lamp first! It cracks my arms to do it: a nasty, high, awk'ard thing. Will he be for ordering tea for 'em, I wonder? when there ain't nothing but a hot loaf in the house, and one pat o' but ——"

"Show me to Mr. Oswald's Cray's private rooms," came the interrupting voice of Miss Davenal, as she entered.

"This way," returned sulky Mrs. Benn, "there's one of them there already."

The "one of 'em" must have applied to the assumed evening party, for in the sitting-room sat Jane Allister. Her bonnet was off; her shawl was unpinned; her fair face was serene and contented as though she were in her own home. Miss Davenal bowed stiffly in her surprise; and the rebellious jealousy rose up in Sara's heart.

"Is Mr. Oswald Cray not here?" asked Miss Davenal, halting on the threshold.

Jane Allister came forward with her good and candid face; and Miss Davenal's reserved tone relaxed. "Mr. Oswald Cray is down stairs with my brother and another gentleman. They are settling some business together: I don't think they will be long."

Miss Davenal did not hear, but Sara repeated the words to her. They sat down; and Miss Allister, finding the elder lady was deaf, took her seat by Sara.

"I came here to-night to settle particulars about our Spanish journey," explained Jane Allister, as if in apology for being found there. "I am going to live in Spain."

Sara heard it as one in a dream. Oswald Cray was going to Spain for a lengthened residence: he had told her so when she was in that room a fortnight ago. If Jane Allister was going with him, why then, it must be that they were going to be married immediately.

Her face flushed; her brow grew moist. In a sort of desperation, in her eager wish to know the worst at once, she turned to Jane Allister.

"Are you going with Mr. Oswald Cray?"

"I am going with my brother."

"With — your — brother! And *not* with Mr. Oswald Cray?"

"No, surely not. How could I go with Mr. Oswald Cray? It would not be proper," she simply added.

"I — I thought — I meant as his wife," said poor Sara, all confused in her heart sickness. "I beg your pardon."

"As his wife! — Mr. Oswald Cray's! Nay, but that is an unlikely thing to fancy. I am not suitable to Mr. Oswald Cray? Do you know him?"

"O yes."

"Then you might have been sure he'd not cast his thoughts to a plain body like me. Why should he? I am not his equal in position. He has been a brother to Frank, and I reverence him beyond any one I know, as a good and true friend. That's all."

Why did her heart give a great bound of hope at the words, when she knew — when she *knew* that he was lost to her? Oswald Cray came bounding up the stairs, but a mist had gathered before Sara's eyes, and she saw nothing clearly.

"Frank is waiting for you, Jane. He will not come upstairs again."

"Does he know about everything?"

"Everything, I think. We have discussed it all, and he will tell you. But he is coming again in the morning."

Oswald had spoken as he shook hands with Miss Davenal. Another moment and they were alone together: the young Scotch lady had left the room.

"Mr. Oswald Cray, you must tell me all you know of this unhappy business, from beginning to end," said Miss Davenal. "I have come to you for the information, and I beg you to conceal nothing. Is Mark Cray in danger?"

Oswald scarcely knew in what sense to take the word. He hesitated as he looked at Miss Davenal.

"How has it all come about? Let me hear the whole of it; the best and the worst. His wife professes to know nothing,

and it was of no use my asking her. The water has got into the mine."

"It is said to be overflowing it; but particulars are not ascertained yet," replied Oswald, as he proceeded to speak of what he knew.

It was not much, for he was nearly as much in the dark as they were. Miss Davenal listened with compressed lips.

At the conclusion of the interview, Oswald took Miss Davenal out to the fly upon his arm, placed her in it, and turned to Sara.

"The last time I saw you I had a journey in my head," he said in a low tone; "I told you I was going to Spain."

"Yes?"

"I am not going now. I have given up the idea. We shall send out a gentleman instead; my friend, Frank Allister. Good-night; good-night, Miss Davenal."

Severely upright in the carriage sat Miss Davenal, her countenance one picture of condemnation for the absent Mark. Only once did she open her lips to Sara opposite to her, and that was as the carriage turned out of the glare and gas of the more populous streets to the quiet one which contained their home.

"What would your brother Edward say to this, were he at home?"

What would he say to something else? As the carriage drew up to the door, a female figure was slowly pacing before it, as if in waiting. And Sara shrank into the remotest corner of the carriage with a shiver of dread, for she recognised her for the stranger, Catherine Wentworth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Hard Usage for Dick.

Do you remember the severe weather of the Christmas of 1860? How for once we had an old-fashioned Christmas Day, when the icicles hung bright and frozen from the trees, and the ponds were alive with skaters, after the manner of the Christmases we read of, of the days gone by. It was indeed a bitter winter, that at the close of 1860, and an unusual number of the poor and friendless, the sick and ailing, passed from its biting sharpness to a better world.

In the mind of one, it almost seemed as though he had held some mysterious prevision of it; and that was Oswald Cray. When deliberating, the previous autumn, whether he should go to Spain himself, times and again had the thought recurred to him — what if we have a sharp winter? — how will Allister weather it? And now that the sharp winter, more terribly sharp than even Oswald dreamt of, had indeed come, he was thankful to have sacrificed his own self-interest. In that more southern climate, Allister would not feel the cold of this; and it almost seemed as if the thought alone brought to Oswald his reward.

“Isn’t it stunning, Aunt Bett?”

You will probably recognise the words as likely to emanate from nobody’s lips but Mr. Dick Davenal’s. Mr. Dick had arrived for the holidays; rather against the inclination as well as the judgment of Miss Bettina, but she did not see her way in courtesy to exclude him. Leopold had been in town with her since October, she and Sara nursing him; so it would have been unkind to keep Dick at school alone for the holidays. Miss Bettina said London was a bad place for Dick; he would be getting into all sorts of mischief; perhaps get run over,

perhaps get lost; it was uncertain what: but Sara, in her love for the boy, promised to keep him in order and out of harm. A rash undertaking.

What of the Great Wheal Bang? The Great Wheal Bang was gone for ever! It had passed out ignobly, never probably to be heard of as a mine again, except in name at certain law courts, to which some of its angry shareholders persisted in bringing it. Mr. Barker was abroad, and did not come home to face the storm; it appeared there was no law to force him home, the matters of the Wheal Bang just escaped that; and he carried on a free-and-easy correspondence with some of the exasperated shareholders, who told him to his face in their answers that he deserved hanging.

And Mark Cray? Mark Cray was nowhere. The defunct company did their best to find him, but, try as they would, they could not discover his hiding-place. They assumed he was out of the country, most probably with Barker, and perhaps their home search was, through that very assumption, less minute than it might have been. A run from danger is always more formidable than a faced one; and if Mark Cray had only faced those shareholders he would no doubt have found their bite less hurtful than their bark. That they were loud and threatening and angry, was true; but Mark would have done well to meet the worst, and get it over. The luxurious house in Grosvenor Place had been long ago abandoned by Mark and his wife; and so temporarily had it been lived in, so fleeting had been the enjoyment of the carriages, the servants, the society, and all the rest of the accessories, that altogether that time seemed only like a dream.

"Isn't it stunning, Aunt Bett?"

Dick was standing at the dining-room window, his sparkling eyes devouring the ice in the streets, the tempting slides in the gutters. A young gentleman who was coming to the

house with a small tray of meat upon his back had just gone down one beautifully, and Dick longed to be behind him. Leo stepped to the window to look, and thought he should like it too; but Leo was not in strong health, as Dick was.

"Isn't it what?" asked Aunt Bett, looking up quickly. "Raining?"

"Stunning," roared Dick.

"I wish you would learn to speak like a gentleman, Richard, and not use those expressions. If they do for school, they don't do for home."

"I have been oiling my skates this morning," continued Dick. "They are rather short, but they'll do."

"Oiling what?"

"My skates."

"What cakes?"

"Ska—a—tes, Aunt Bett. Everything will bear to-day."

"Nothing bears in London," said Miss Bettina. "You must not try it, Richard. A great many boys are drowned every winter in the Serpentine."

"What muffs they must be!" returned Dick; "Aunt Bett, the ponds would bear you, if you'd put on a pair of skates and try. They'd bear me a hundred times over."

"Would they?" said Miss Bettina. She turned to Sara, who was busy at the table, and pointed with her finger to indicate Dick.

"I will not have him to go into this danger. Do you hear, Sara? *You* undertook to keep him out of harm, if he came to us, so see to it. Perhaps the best plan will be to lock up his skates. I don't want to have him brought home drowned."

Dick was resentful. He might have broken into open rebellion but for fear of being sent back to enjoy his holidays at school. He sat in a sullen sort of mood, on the edge of a

chair, his hands in his pockets clicking their contents about, and his boots beating time restlessly on the carpet.

"How it's all altered!" he exclaimed.

"How is what altered?" inquired Sara. They were alone then. Miss Bettina had gone from the room to give Leopold his eleven o'clock dose of strengthening medicine.

"Since Uncle Richard's time. Why, he bought me those very skates last winter, when that frost came in November. That is, he sent word to school that I might have them. And then we had no more ice at all! and Uncle Richard kept wishing through the holidays there might be some for us! *He'd* have let us skate."

Sara was silent. Things had indeed altered since then.

"It's an awful shame of Aunt Bett! The ice stunning thick, and a fellow can't enjoy it! Drowned! She might get drowned herself perhaps, but *I* shouldn't. Uncle Richard would have let us skate in Hallingham!" added Dick, excessively resentful. "He wanted us to skate."

"But I think it was a little different, Richard dear. Those ponds at Hallingham were not deep; and people do get drowned in the Serpentine. And there's nobody to go with you."

Dick tossed his head. "Perhaps you think I want somebody! You had better send a nursemaid. Fine holidays, these are!"

A few minutes more of sitting still, and Dick could stand it no longer. He darted into the passage and snatched his cap. Sara, quick as he, caught him with the street-door in his hand.

"Dick, it must not be. You know I have answered for you to Aunt Bettina."

"All right, Sara. I'm not going near the Serpentine, or any other deep water."

"You promise?"

"Yes; on my honour. There! Why, I have not got my skates. I'm going up and down the street-slides; that's all. You can't expect me to sit twirling my thumbs all day in Aunt Bett's parlour, as Leo does."

She had no fear then. If Dick once gave his honour, or if put upon his honour, he could but be a loyal knight. Left to himself, no promise extracted from him, he would have decamped right off to the Serpentine, or to anything else mischievous and dangerous; but not now.

But Dick "took it out" — the words were his own — in street-slides. All the most attractive *ruisseaux* within a few miles of home Mr. Dick exercised his legs upon. It required a terrible amount of resolution to keep his promise not to "go near" the forbidden water; and how long Dick stood in envy, his nose frozen to the park railings as he watched the streams of people pouring towards the ice, he never knew. He was not in a good humour; the slides were very ignoble pastime indeed, only fit for street-boys; and he thought if there was one gentleman more ill-used than another that day in all Her Majesty's dominions, that one was himself.

Mr. Dick stopped out his own time. He knew that he would be expected home about one o'clock to have something to eat; but as nothing had been expressly said to him, he took rather a savage pleasure in letting them expect, punishing his hunger. He saw a man selling hot potatoes; and he bought three and ate them, skins and all. Dick was not in the least troubled with proud notions: Leo would have looked askance at the tempting edible, and passed on the other side; Dick danced round the man's machine while he feasted, in the face and eyes of the passers-by. If Miss Davenal had but seen him!

Altogether, what with the slides, the hot potatoes, and

the temper, Mr. Richard Davenal remained out long after dark. When he began to think it might be as well to return home, and to feel as if fifteen wolves were inside him fighting for their dinner, he was in some obscure and remote region of Chelsea, where the population was more crowded than aristocratic, and the ice abundant. Happening to cast his eyes to a clock in a baker's shop, he saw that it wanted but twenty-five minutes to six.

"My!" ejaculated Dick in his dismay. Miss Davenal's dinner-hour had been altered from six to five while the boys were with her, and Dick had certainly meant to be home to time. He had not thought it was so late as this. Dick's hair stood on end, and the wolves fought desperately.

"Suppose old Bett should say I shan't have any dinner!"

The shop next door to the baker's was a cook's shop — as they are called: and perhaps Dick's dreadful doubt caused him irresistibly to linger for a fond moment at the window and gaze at the attractions inside. Under Dick's very nose was a steaming mound of beef just out of the pot, some parsnips round it; other joints were there in plenty; peas-pudding, plum-pudding, sausages, and a whole host of things irresistible to a boy in Dick's famishing condition. He mechanically put his hand into his pocket, lest a stray sixpence might by some miracle be there. In vain. Dick Davenal was one who could not keep money for an hour, and his having sufficient to buy the potatoes was a fact notable.

Hurried as he was, he could not tear himself from the tempting shop. The shopman, in a white apron, a great carving-knife and fork in his hand, was cutting thin slices from a cold round of beef and placing them in the scale on a piece of white paper. The balance went down, and he rolled the paper round the meat and handed it to the customer waiting for it, a young woman — or rather lady, for she looked

like one — who wore a black veil over her face. She gave sixpence and some halfpence in return, but the man did not seem to like the sixpence; he held it close to the gas and then showed it to her, and she put her veil aside and bent her face nearer while she looked at it.

If ever Dick Davenal believed he was in a dream, he believed so then. He rubbed his eyes; he rubbed his frozen nose; he stared through the intervening steam; and he pinched himself to see whether he was awake. For that face was the face of his cousin, Mrs. Cray.

Dick could not believe his senses. The shopman apparently decided that the sixpence was a good one, and put it in his till, and the lady had left the shop before Dick recovered his bewilderment. He had believed Mr. and Mrs. Cray were abroad. From a shrewd boy like Dick it had been impossible to guard the secret that something was wrong; besides, he had heard of the failure of the Great Wheal Bang, and that its promoters were away, abroad or somewhere.

But that was surely Caroline gone out of the shop with the paper of meat in her hand! Dick's spirit went down to zero. However *he* might condescend to the purchase of hot potatoes, and suchlike stray escapades, he did not like to see Caroline buy cooked meat and carry it away with her. Dick knew that something or other must be all wrong, and he suddenly felt as timid as Leo.

She crossed the road and went down a by-street, where the lights were scanty and the houses poor. Dick followed her. He saw how tightly her veil was drawn over her face; and she walked with her head down: it might be to keep out the cold, or it might be to avoid observation.

She turned into a house on the left-hand side whose door stood open; a shabby-looking house, but sufficiently large. Dick, hardly certain in his own mind yet, deliberated whether

he should follow her and show himself: and when he at length went to the door nobody was in sight. He took courage and knocked; and a woman came out of the parlour on the right.

"Is Mrs. Cray here?" asked Dick.

"Mrs. who?"

"Mrs. Cray. She's just gone in."

"There's nobody here of that name. Who's Mrs. Cray? You have mistook the house, young man."

Dick had his wits about him, as the saying runs, and they were sufficiently alert to prevent his insisting on the point of its being Mrs. Cray. "I'm sure I saw some lady come in," said he.

"Mrs. Mark came in a minute ago, for I met her in the passage. First floor if you want her."

"Can I go up?" asked Dick.

"That's as you please," returned the woman, who was crusty enough to be first cousin to Mrs. Benn. "The other lodgers in the house is nothing to me, who goes up to 'em or who doesn't."

She retreated inside the parlour and banged the door. Dick stumbled upstairs in the dark, the words "first floor" having guided him. Some light came in from a window on the landing, and he distinctly heard Caroline's voice in the front room. Dick-fashion, he burst in without knocking.

Caroline gave a short scream. She was untying her bonnet, and the paper of meat, slowly unfolding itself, lay on the table. It was a plain sitting-room carpeted with drugget, a large sofa covered with dark blue stuff seeming to take up one side of it. A white cloth was spread on part of the table, with some tea-cups and saucers, a loaf of bread, and a piece of butter.

"Caroline, I was sure it was you!"

The first moment of surprise over, Caroline threw herself

on a chair and burst into tears. Dick sat down opposite to her and stared round the room, staring off his bewilderment. Poor Dick was not possessed of any superfluous sentiment, and the sobs and emotion only made him feel awkward. The sight of a home face was too much for Mrs. Cray.

"Is Mark here?" Dick asked presently.

"No."

Dick glanced round again, but he could see no door except the one he had entered at.

"I'm sure I heard you talking to somebody, Caroline. It made me know which was the room."

"I was talking to myself. The words I said were, 'I hope Mark will not be long,' and I suppose I spoke them aloud."

A few final sobs, and the emotion passed. Dick was timid, almost nervous, and he never remembered to have been so in his life. A thought crossed the boy's mind of what his Uncle Richard would say, could he see this curious state of things.

"Do you live here, Caroline?"

"Yes. We went away in the country for a little time at first; but it was so out of the way of hearing anything, so dull, so wretched, that we came back again. Mark thought it would be better to come pretty near to the old neighbourhood; that there was less chance of our being looked for there than elsewhere."

"You don't have all the house."

"All the house!" echoed Caroline. "We only have this room and the use of the kitchen, which I hardly ever go down to. That sofa is a bed," she added, pointing to it. "Mark draws it out at night."

Dick felt more at sea than ever. "Has Mark got no money?"

Caroline shook her head. "There's a little left; not much. We did not save a thing from Grosvenor Place. People came in and took possession while Mark was away, and I got frightened and left it. Afterwards, when my clothes were asked for, they sent me a boxful of the poorest I had, and said those were all. I don't know whether it was that they kept the best, or that the maid-servants helped themselves to them. Dick!" she passionately added, "I'd rather die than have to bear all this."

"Do you have to go out and buy the meat?" questioned Dick, unable to get the practical part he had seen out of his head.

"There's a boy that waits on the lodgers, the landlady's son, and he goes on errands sometimes. Mark thought we should be safer in a house like this, where there are different lodgers, and one does not interfere with the concerns of the others; that we should be less likely to attract notice. In truth we were afraid to venture on a better place where persons might recognise us."

"Afraid of what?" questioned Dick.

"I'm sure I hardly know," she answered. "Of his being arrested, I suppose."

"I say, does Sara know you are here?"

Caroline shook her head. "I have written her a note twice, saying we are safe; but Mark would not let me give the address. Aunt Bettina has shaken us off, there's no doubt; she'll never forgive Mark."

"Forgive him for what?"

"Oh, altogether," returned Caroline, with a gesture of impatience. "There was the leaving Hallingham, and Sara's money, and other things."

"Where is Mark?" continued Dick.

"He won't be long. He strolls out a little after dark, but he does not care to venture abroad by day-light. And so, you are up for the holidays, I suppose?"

Dick nodded. "Aunt Bett wouldn't have us at midsummer. But Leo broke his arm, and he wasn't strong, and she sent for him; and then she said I might come up for Christmas, and we could both go back to school together. I say, wasn't it unkind of her not to have us in the summer? She said her house was small. Summer holidays are jollier than winter ones, especially where they don't let you go on the ice."

Did a remembrance cross Caroline of somebody else who would not have them in the summer? — whose house was not small? Probably not. Caroline had room only for her own griefs. Since the falling of the blow she had existed in a state of bewilderment. The change was so great, the order of things so completely altered, that at times she believed she must be in a prolonged dream, and should shortly wake up to reality. As one who is suddenly put ashore in a foreign country, where the land, the customs, the people, and the tongue, are all strange to him, and he can only accept them passively, yielding himself perforce to the necessity of circumstances, so it was with Caroline Cray. Believe me, I am telling you no untrue story.

"How you cough!" exclaimed Dick, as she was interrupted by a heavy fit of coughing, not for the first time.

"I caught a bad cold. It was very bad for a day or two, and I lay in bed. O Dick! I wonder if I shall have a bed-room again!"

"Couldn't you have a bed-room as well as this room?" sensibly answered Dick.

"There was only this room to let when we came here, and

we thought it would do. It's tolerably good-looking you see, and we are more to ourselves. Every week, too, we are hoping to leave it."

"Where to go to?"

"I don't know. Mark says something will be sure to turn up."

"I say, do they know about this in Barbadoes?"

"Not from us. I daresay Aunt Bettina has taken care to tell them. Is she as deaf as ever, Dick?"

"She's deafer. And she's getting a regular old woman. What do you think? she'd not let me go out skating this morning, for fear —"

A gentleman entered, and cut Dick's revelations short. The boy looked at him in puzzled bewilderment, for he thought he knew him, and yet did not. It was a full minute before Dick recognised him for Mark Cray.

Formerly Mark had whiskers and no moustache; now he had a moustache and no whiskers, and his beard was growing, and his face looked longer. He had on blue spectacles too. Altogether, Dick was hardly certain yet.

Mark did not seem glad to see him. In manner he rather appeared to resent the accident which had discovered them to Dick, than to feel pleasure at it. Caroline put the slices of beef upon a dish, made the tea, and asked Dick to partake.

But Dick declined. And nobody, perhaps, would have given careless Dick credit for the true motive, or for the real self-denial that it was to a hungry boy. He had somehow drawn a conclusion that Mr. and Mrs. Cray had not too much meat for themselves, and he would not lessen it.

"I can't stay now," he said rising, "I shall have Aunt Bett at me as it is. Good-night, Mr. Cray; good-night, Caroline."

Mr. Cray followed him down the stairs. "You must be very cautious not to say that you found us here," he said. "Can we depend upon you?"

"As if you couldn't!" returned Dick. "I know! A fellow of ours at school has got a big brother, and he has to be in hiding nine months at least out of every year. I'll tell nobody but Sara."

He vaulted off, or perhaps Mark Cray's injunction might have been extended to Sara in particular. When he reached home, Miss Bettina who had believed nothing less but that he was drowned, and had sent Neal to a circuit of police-stations, met him in the corridor, followed by Sara and Leo.

"You ungrateful boy! Where have you been?"

"Don't, Aunt Bettina! No need to seize hold of me in that way. I have only been sliding. I haven't been to the water."

"You shall go back to school to-morrow," said Miss Bettina, as she turned into the dining-room.

Dick caught his cousin by the arm. "You be off after Aunt Bett, Leo; I want to speak to Sara. I say," he continued in a whisper, as Leo obeyed him, "I have seen Caroline and Mark Cray!"

"Nonsense, Dick! Why did you stay out so and frighten us?"

"I have. I should have been in earlier but for that. Frightened? How stupid you must all be! As if I couldn't take care of myself. I saw Carine in a beef and pudding shop, buying cold meat, and I watched where she went to, and I've been there for half an hour, and I saw Mark! He has shaved off his whiskers, and wears blue —"

"Hush!" breathed Sara, as Dorcas came up the stairs. "You must tell me later."

CHAPTER XIX.

Weary Days.

THE cold, bitter, biting winter passed away, and when the lovely spring came round again, little trace was left of its effects, save in the remembrance of those in whose homes sickness, or privation, or death, had been busy.

Two of those visitations had been rife in the poor house of Caroline Cray: sickness and privation. Perhaps you noticed Caroline's reply to Dick's question of whether Mark had no money! there was a little left, she said, not much. Left from what? Dick did not ask.

If ever an unfortunate company had come to grief more completely than other unfortunate companies, it was surely that noted one, the Great Wheal Bang. Sympathising friends — Barker's and Mark's — were wont to assure those gentlemen that they had "managed wretchedly:" and if we may dare to assume that the reproach was levelled at the fact of having secured nothing for themselves, it was a right one. On the day that Mark Cray went up to the offices for the last time, he had but a trifling sum of money about him: Caroline had even less in her own purse; and that was all. Barker's word of precaution had secured the diamond ring and studs, and these were converted into money, Mark and Barker equally dividing the spoil. Barker, with his share, took a little tour abroad while the cloud blew over; Mark, as you have seen, went into hiding, and lived upon his part as long as it held out.

Yes, it was an unhappy fact, very debasing indeed after all the glory of Grosvenor Place, lowering as you may feel it to be to this history, Mr. Mark Cray hid himself by day, and slipped out to take the air at dusk in a moustache and blue

spectacles. Mark Cray could but be a coward in the hour of trial; he ran from the danger instead of facing it. Had Mark but looked the angry shareholders and the trouble in the face, he need not have been so very fearful; but to look a difficulty in the face was not in the nature of Mark Cray. He scarcely understood what he was afraid of; he did not know what they could do to him — whether imprison him, or make him a bankrupt, or what; and Mark would rather have jumped into the sea than ascertain. He was exactly like a child who runs away screaming from a dark closet, and dare not look to see whether cause for terror is there. Some of us, my friends, have been sadly frightened at shadows.

When this state of affairs was to end, and what was to get Mark out of his difficulty, he did not at present see. As long as the money lasted, he was not unduly anxious. He had great faith in something “turning up,” he had unlimited faith in Barker; and Barker’s letters were pretty frequent, and in the highest degree cheering. Barker happened to have a cousin, about the nineteenth remove, settled at Honfleur in Normandie, and Barker had steered for the same port, and seemed to be living at ease there. Towards the close of the winter, he wrote word to Mark that he had something good in contemplation, connected with Paris, and if it came to anything Mark should share in it.

But when Mark’s money was gone, things changed. He grew restless and gloomy. He could not starve, he could not go to the workhouse: he must do something. Miss Bettina Davenal would not help them: she said she could not — perhaps with justice. Leopold Davenal had been an expense to her, and was still; he went back to school after the Christmas holidays with Dick, but he was not strong yet, and sundry expensive extars were provided for him out of her pocket. That was not much: but a heavier expense had fallen upon her: for

she had repaid Mr. Wheatley the two hundred pounds borrowed by Sara. Sara had disclosed to her aunt the fact of borrowing it, and in her pride Miss Bettina had made a sacrifice and repaid the sum. She had none left to bestow on Mark; there was clearly no help to be had from her.

And Caroline? You can take a look at her as she sat in the sun, which was shining into the room this bright day in early April. Perhaps you remember a remark Dr. Davenal once made — that Caroline was not one, as he believed, to bear well the adversities of life. Dr. Davenal was quite right: neither physically nor mentally did they agree with poor Caroline.

I don't know whether anybody gets ill at once under a great shock. Caroline had not. When it fell upon her, she was too stunned, too entirely surprised, to be anything but bewildered. It may be questioned if a change so sudden — from seemingly assured prosperity to hiding and disgrace and poverty — has ever fallen. You may feel inclined to question it in this instance; nevertheless, I repeat that I am telling you the simple truth. The reaction had come now, and Caroline Cray gave way sadly. Her cough, that Dick remarked upon, had got well; but she would lie back in her chair all day, and it seemed next to impossible to get her out of it.

But if the body was at rest, the mind was only the more active. Caroline's hours, in point of fact, were pretty equally divided between outward complaining and inward lamentation. Such lamentation is nearly always rebellious, and so was hers. The blow had been so complete; the change was so very great! All that pomp and vanity, all the luxuries, the carelessness, the pleasure attendant on that one past sunshiny wave in life's current, to have given place to this! Perhaps the worst mortification, looking back, was that the play now seemed to have been so *unreal*; as if they had had no right to

indulge in it, were such fools to have embarked in it, worse than fools to have believed in it. Mortified, fretful, miserable, Caroline Cray seemed to live but in repining and repentance. Mark was different. He neither repined nor repented; he was always restless, always expecting something to turn up; and he would stalk up and down the room, giving tongue to all sorts of wild visions of what he would do, were he but clear of the world and the Great Wheal Bang.

As he was doing now. While Caroline sat listless and inert in her chair, Mark was indulging a dream of the future, sanguine as a child. He had lately taken to consult the newspapers, and one tempting advertisement in particular had attracted him. Mark Cray was getting that experience which comes inevitably in a life of vicissitude; he had yet to learn how many of these advertisements are but traps for the unwary, how next to impossible to be the one successful applicant, if they are genuine. But ever and anon Mark's dream was brought unpleasantly to a break, as the recollection intruded itself that he was not a free man.

"You see, Carine, if I were but clear of that resentful company, there are a hundred good things to be picked up. I'm sure there's a dozen at least in the paper every day. That's a splendid thing, I know, that one advertisement of this morning; any fellow securing that——"

"Where's the use of talking of it?" interrupted Carine. "It all comes to nothing. You know you are not clear of the company."

She spoke in a fretful, peevish tone. Just at first, Mark's sanguine visions of rising again more gloriously than ever, like a phoenix from its ashes, had somewhat infected her, but she was learning what they were worth: as she had just said, "it all came to nothing." Utterly weary was her spirit. Hope deferred making the heart sick; but hope destroyed —

and it had come to that with Caroline Cray — maketh it die.

Physical privation tells terribly on the mind as well as the body, and it was telling upon her. They were next door to starving. What made it worse for Caroline was, that hers was a constitution *requiring* the best of nourishment. The Davenals were a healthy family, but there had been a taint in her mother's blood. These physical privations would alone have made Caroline fretful: and she could not help it.

"I shall be clear of it soon," said Mark.

"But how?"

Even sanguine Mark could not detail the precise means by which the emancipation was to be accomplished. "Oh, somehow," said he, in his careless way. "The company must wind itself up."

"Why can't you apply to Oswald?"

He shook his head very decisively. "I can't face *him*. And if I did, he'd not assist me. He has lost too much, and is sure to bear malice."

"Are we to go on like this for ever?"

"I hope we shan't go on so for a month. I wish you'd not talk so, Caroline."

"How am I to talk? You have been saying the same all along."

"Well, it's of no good your looking on the dark side of things. You are always doing it now."

Caroline was silent for a few moments, when she suddenly lifted up her hands, and her voice broke into a passionate wail.

"Oh, if that money had but been settled on me, as Uncle Richard wished! This must be a judgment upon us for defying his last commands."

"Rubbish!" said Mark.

"Are we to go out in the street and beg?" she plaintively asked.

"Are you going to be a child? One must get a rub or two through life, Caroline. Barker has been down upon his beam-ends five or six times, just as much as we are, but it has always come right again."

She relapsed into a fit of weeping; half her hours, abed and up, were so spent. Mark had ceased either to soothe or reproach; he had tried both, but ineffectually; and now was fain to let her weep, simply because he was helpless to prevent it. Mark Cray could not be unkind; he was not that; but he was hardly the right sort of husband for adversity. Shallow-minded, shallow-hearted, possessed of no depth of feeling, there seemed something wanting in him now. He did his best to cheer his wife; but the result was not satisfactory.

The fits of weeping would sometimes go on to hysterics; sometimes stopped just short of it. As this one stopped. Caroline suddenly roused herself and looked round wearily at the mantel-piece, as if there were a time-piece there, perhaps in momentary forgetfulness. Grosvenor Place had been rich in such; elegant bijoux, worth no end of money.

"I wish Sara would come!"

"Sara?" repeated Mark, halting in his monotonous promenade.

"I wrote to her to come."

She spoke the words half defiantly. Sara, in consequence of the discovery of Master Dick Davenal, had come to see them once; but she was not encouraged to repeat the visit. Mark especially was against it. "If we have them coming here, we may get dropped upon," he had said to his wife; "it would never do." But poor Caroline, wearied out with the wretched loneliness that seemed to continue month after

month, and to have no end, had at length written to her cousin.

"Why did you not tell me, Caroline?"

"You might have forbidden me."

"It's just what I should have done. We don't want her here. What good will she do?"

"What good will anything in the world do? I wish I was out of it!"

Mark Cray began to ask himself the question whether the expected visit could be stopped now. He had an intense dislike to meet Sara Davenal: we all shrink from meeting those whom we have injured directly or indirectly. But the question was set at rest by Sara's entrance, and Mark, after a short greeting, disappeared.

All Caroline did for the first quarter of an hour was to sob hysterically. Sara, in slighter mourning now, unfastened the white crape strings of her straw bonnet, and sat over her in dismay, her sweet face full of compassion for the change she saw.

"I want to know how it all is to end," were the first distinct words Caroline uttered. "Am I to stop here till I die?"

A question difficult for Sara to answer. "Is Mark doing nothing?" she asked.

"He is doing nothing. He can't do anything while that business of the Wheal Bang hangs over him. If that were settled, there are fifty things he might get into. And if it can't be settled, we may both of us as well die at once as be famished to death. For that's what it would come to. Those poor creatures that shut themselves up with the fumes of charcoal are not so much to blame, after all."

"Caroline!"

"Well, I mean it," returned Caroline, a sullen tone beginning to mingle with her sobs. "It is all very well for you to

exclaim 'Caroline!' as if I were mad; but you don't know what sorrow is. Nobody does until poverty comes."

Sara thought that there were worse sorrows to be borne in the world than poverty. And she was right; bad as poverty, to those unaccustomed to it, undoubtedly is. "What can I do for you?" she gently asked.

"Here we are, buried alive, and nobody comes near us! Sara, if you only knew how I yearn for a home face! — how I lie and cry for it!"

"Mark — and you also — said I must not come, lest it might lead to discovery."

"Neither must you, I suppose. At least, not often. But sometimes I think it would be well if discovery happened. There'd be an end to this uncertainty at any rate. What is Mark to do if the thing can't get settled?"

She asked the question in strange earnestness, and Sara was struck with the yearning beauty of the lifted face, of the wasting form. The violet eyes were larger than of yore, the cheeks were of a delicate crimson, and the hands were long and white and thin.

"But can it not get settled?" returned Sara.

"We have nothing to eat, you know. That is, there's bread, and such-like; but I can't eat it. Mark will dine on bread and cheese, or a thick slice of bread and butter; and he really does not seem to mind; but I can't. O Sara! if I could but have a good dinner!"

Sara caught up her breath. What comfort could she give?

"Sometimes, when I am sick with hunger, I lie and imagine the dinners we used to sit down to in Grosvenor Place. I *imagine* it, you know; that they are before me now, and I am eating them. Turkey and bread sauce, or salmon and lobster sauce — it's nearly always substantial things I think of, I sup-

pose because of my hunger — and I quite seem to taste them, to eat through a whole plateful. Sara, it is true.”

Sara Davenal had heard the doctor speak of some kinds of hunger as a disease, and could only suppose this must be one.

“I wish — I wish I could help you!” she murmured.

“You can’t, I know. You have it not in your power, and Aunt Bettina won’t: she’s implacable. I did not send for you to ask it. But, Sara, there’s Oswald Cray. If you would ask him, perhaps he might do something for Mark.”

The words startled her. “Ask Oswald Cray!”

“I think if he would listen to any one, it is you. I don’t forget how fond he used to be of you in the days gone by. Indeed, I got to think — but I was wrong, I suppose, so let it pass. O Sara, you’ll ask him for my sake! Don’t abandon us quite. I think he might help Mark out of this difficulty. Perhaps he might see the company, and get them to be friendly with Mark; or perhaps he’d pay a few of Mark’s pressing debts. It might not take much money.”

“But why cannot Mark ask him?”

“He won’t. Mark would rather it came to the charcoal — not that anything of that sort would ever be in *his* line — than apply to Oswald. There was some trouble between them about the money Oswald put into the mine, and Mark has kept away from him since. That is just why I have sent for you. Mark will not apply to Oswald; no, not if it were to save him from prison; and I don’t feel well enough to go, and my bonnet’s shabby. O Sara, when a recollection comes over me — and it is always coming — of the nice clothes I had, and how foolishly they were abandoned, I feel fit to go mad. Any way, unless a change takes place, I shan’t want clothes long. Sara, surely you will do for us so trifling a thing as this!”

To pursue the interview would be waste of time. When

Sara Davenal quitted her cousin, it was with a given promise to see Oswald Cray. Very much indeed did she shrink from it; as much as she had shrunk from those interviews with Mr. Alfred King: but she saw no other means to help them; and in truth she did not anticipate much would come of this.

Money seemed to be wanted everywhere. Miss Bettina complained sadly of shortness; the repaid money to Mr. Wheatley had crippled her: and Captain Davenal's letters to Sara dwelt on his embarrassments. They told her privately how "hard up" he was, and in his random meaningless way, said he should have to run away to Australia and dig for gold, unless some dropped shortly from the clouds. Captain Davenal's wife, as it turned out, was only an heiress in prospective; but he appeared excessively fond of her, anxious to supply her with every luxury: and we all know that a married captain's pay, without other means, does not accord with luxuries in India.

His wife! Over and over again Sara asked herself how it was possible Edward could have married her, how he could speak of her in the fond manner that he did, if there really existed that impediment. All the trouble and the care seemed to fall upon herself individually—upon her own hidden heart. So long as there existed a grain of doubt, she could not speak of this to Edward; and, besides, the letter might fall into the hands of his young wife.

Personally, Sara had not been annoyed by Catherine Wentworth. Occasionally through the winter and spring she had seen this young woman hovering outside, waiting for Neal; twice she had come boldly to the house, knocked, and asked for him. Miss Bettina's keen eyes had seen her once. "Is it one of your nieces, Neal?" she graciously asked; "pray invite her in." "O no, ma'am, she is no relative of mine," returned Neal, with pointed emphasis. Sara's breath had

quicken at the colloquy; but it ended there. She was surprised at this immunity from personal annoyance, and wondered how long it would be hers.

It was a coincidence rather remarkable that Oswald Cray should be at the door when Sara returned home from the visit to Caroline. About once in three months he made a call of politeness on Miss Davenal. Sara met him turning away: Miss Davenal was out, and he had left his card. He would have passed her after shaking hands — his visit was not to her — but Sara detained him, her cheeks in a glow at having to do it.

"It is very strange," she exclaimed. "I was but now thinking how I could best get to see you. Do you mind coming in with me for five minutes?"

He returned with her, perhaps all too willingly. A great many of us are tempted to stray from the strict line of duty marked out in our own minds. Sara led the way to the drawing-room, and told him where she had been, and what Caroline said. The declining sun — for the afternoon was drawing towards its close — fell on Oswald as he sat listening to her. It was the same noble face that she had so loved to look upon — calm, still, *good*; but somehow all its youth seemed to have passed away. The eyes had a look of habitual sadness; some silver threads mingled with the dark chestnut hair. She simply repeated Mrs. Cray's words, almost as a child repeats a lesson; throwing no persuasive tone, no pleading of her own into it, for she felt that she had no right to do so.

"Did Mark Cray wish you to ask me this?" he inquired, as she ceased the tale.

"Not Mark. Only Caroline. By what she said, I fancy Mark Cray feels — feels ashamed to ask you anything."

"And he well may," answered Oswald, the old look of pride unpleasingly crossing his face. "I could have borne

almost anything from Mark better than deliberate deceit. I cannot, no I cannot forgive it."

Neither spoke for a few moments. Sara had untied her bonnet-strings, and sat with her face a little bent; the eyes raised straight to him in their simple trust. He had one glove off; it was a black one; and he was gently swaying it as his elbow rested on the arm of the chair.

"I cannot quite understand what it is that Mrs. Cray would ask me. She cannot seriously expect that I should pay Mark's debts. His personal debts alone would take, I imagine, a far deeper purse than mine. I am but making my way upwards, and Mark has taken care to put me back to an extent I shall not readily recover. Pay Marcus Cray's debts! It is not within my power, any more than it would be within my will."

Sara was silent, save for a glance. It said how foolish she herself had thought the demand.

"I very much fear that Mark Cray is one of those men who want others to 'pay their debts' throughout life," he resumed. "There are such. Were he free to-morrow, he would be embarrassed again in a year. To assist such men is no charity."

"Do you think anything can be done to clear him of the company?"

"Not while he keeps aloof. Mark himself must know it to be impossible; or ought to know it. The only chance for these affairs to be wound up, is for him and Barker to come forward."

"Yes, I thought so," she answered. "But — Caroline tells me — they are near upon starving!"

"More shame to Mark!" exclaimed Oswald. "I cannot *describe* to you how this affair has pained me. Mark is my father's son, and his disgrace seems to be reflected upon me.

His hiding himself is the worst part of it all. While he does so, he is only prolonging the trouble and the ill. Believe me, it would not be a kindness to help Mark. Let him come forward as a man and a gentleman ought; that would be the best help to him."

Sara felt that he was right; but she felt also that Mark would *not* come forward; and what was to be the ending?

"They are living in only one room; it is at — —"

"Don't tell it me!" impulsively interrupted Oswald, something like anger in his tone. "I would not for the world be made cognisant of Marcus Cray's hiding-place. People have come to me for it times and again; and I am thankful to assure them in all truth that I know it not."

He rose, as if wishing to put an end to the subject, and held out his hand to Sara.

"At least you will forgive me for presuming to trouble you so far," she murmured. "I could not help it: Caroline besought me very piteously."

His dark blue eyes, so earnestly bent on her, gave sufficient answer, even without the pressure of the hand, the tender tone of the low words.

"You should not speak of it in that light. If you knew how great a pleasure it is to me for you to ask me anything! I had almost said it is the only one left to me in my matter-of-fact, working life. You and I have none too much of such: it seems to me that we both have to suffer for the wrong-doing of others."

CHAPTER XX.

Something "Turned Up" at Last.

You might have taken a picture of the group in Mark Cray's room to-day, if only by way of contrast to that of yesterday. The living figures were the same: Mark, his wife, and Sara Davenal; but the contrast lay in the expression, in the tone of feeling. Yesterday it had been nothing but gloom, depression, almost despair; to-day it was all hope and hilarity. The cloud had gone from the faces of Mark and his wife, to give place to almost triumphal gaiety. On Sara's there was a look of pleasure, mingled with perplexity, as if she would rejoice with them, but as yet scarcely understood what there was to rejoice at.

Poor Mark Cray! The very slightest straw of expectancy was sufficient to send his sanguine spirit into the clouds. All this change had been wrought by a letter from Barker, which the eleven o'clock post had brought. Barker, who was another of Mark's stamp, had suddenly discovered, or thought he had discovered, that an English doctor was wanted in Honfleur. He wrote over to Mark, strongly recommending him to come and establish himself, and to lose no time, lest the opening should be snapped up. "There's a goodish many English here," said the letter, "and not the ghost of an English doctor. If an English fellow gets ill he must die, unless he chooses to call in a French surgeon, and the chances are *he'll* bleed him to death. If you'll believe me, they bled a young English lady this week for measles! She seemed ill, and her friends called in a Monsieur Somebody, with a name as unpronounceable as that mine of ours, and he looked at her, and asked a few questions, said he thought she was sickening for some disorder or other, and therefore

he'd bleed her. Well, he did bleed her, and ordered her some drink, called *tissan*, or some such name — I always shirked my French at school — which it's my belief is made of nothing but sugar and water. Bleeding for measles! The English say to me: 'What a boon it would be if we had a countryman established here as doctor!' So Mark, old fellow, I've thought of you; and my advice to you is, come and try it until something better turns up. I'm off to Paris shortly, but I'll stop here and welcome you first, if you decide to come. I know you hate your profession, and so do I, or I might try the opening myself; but if you don't mind taking it up as a temporary thing, I think you may manage to find enough practice to get along with. Living's cheap over here, and the scenery's lovely, though the town isn't much. Havre is only twenty minutes' distance by steamer; it's over the water — the *manche*, as they call it; and Harfleur lies by its side, nearer to us still. We have got an English church, you can tell Mrs. Cray, if she's particular upon the point; we had a splendid sermon last Sunday, preached by a stranger. Altogether, it seems to me to be worth your thinking of *under present circumstances*, and when the horizon has cleared a little, you can leave the place as readily as you come to it."

And this was the golden bait that had laid tempting hold on Mark. Perhaps to a man "under his present circumstances," as Mr. Barker put it, it did look favourable. Estimating things by comparison, it looked more than well. That one present room he was in, the dinnerless days, the blue spectacles, and all the rest of the little disagreeables you have heard hints of, were things to be flown from with the fleetest wings, if they could be exchanged for the position of a flourishing doctor in Honfleur. Mark was on his exalted

ropes again, and his wife seemed to have thrown off her sorrow and her ailments.

The first consideration was money. This desirable place could not be reached without some. Even sanguine Mark allowed that. Just a little, to allow of their getting there, and a pound or so to pay for lodgings, and carry them on until his patients came in. He and his wife were deep in the difficulties of the matter when Sara interrupted them. She had come to tell Caroline of her ill-success with Oswald Cray.

But Caroline was in no mood to listen to aught that savoured of non-success, and Sara's news was overwhelmed with the other. Barker's letter was read to her, and Mark enlarged upon it in his sanguine strain.

"I knew something would turn up," said he. "Barker's a right good fellow not to keep it himself. Those continental towns are charming, if you can put up with the sameness: of course they get a little *same* after a time. Not all of them, though. We stopped three months in Boulogne once, before my father's death, and were sorry to come away from it. Only think how this will set Carine up, after all the late bother."

"I fear Honfleur is a small place to support a medical man," observed Sara, who could look at the proposal more dispassionately than the other two.

"It's a lovely place," fired Mark. "Barker says so. It's renowned in history. If the places he mentions are not of note, I'd like to know what are. History tells us that! Why, it was from Harfleur that the children of one of the kings set sail and were overtaken by a storm and drowned, and the poor old father never was seen to smile again. I'm sure I remember having to learn that in my history. Honfleur a small

place! Not support a doctor! You must be saying it for the purpose, Sara!"

"Well, Mark, I don't think it is large; but what I meant was, support an English doctor. Are there enough English living there to do that?"

"Of course there are," returned Mark, whose sanguine mood resented nothing more than a check. "Would Barker say there was an opening if there wasn't?"

She could have retorted that Barker had no more judgment than Mark; but it was utterly useless, and she held her tongue. Besides, she did hope that Mark might pick up some practice, and any change seemed an improvement upon the present state of things.

It seemed that there was only Oswald to apply to in the difficulty, and Sara was asked to do it. She declined. Upon which Caroline, in a defiant spirit — for she was angry with her — said she would go to him herself.

She kept her resolution. At the dusk of evening, not before, Caroline Cray took her way to Parliament Street, her step quick, her mood defiant still; not defiant against anybody in particular, but against the whole world save herself and Mark.

But when she came in view of the house she slackened her pace, going on slowly and cautiously, as one who wishes to reconnoitre the ground beforehand. What was she afraid of? Of meeting any of the wrathful shareholders of the Great Wheal Bang? If so, it was surely a singular coincidence that one of them should at that very moment be at Oswald Cray's door.

He was being shown out by a lady in an inverted bonnet, if the term may be held applicable — brim downwards, crown upwards. Caroline recognised him at once as a Major Pratt, rather an extensive shareholder. Some acquaintanceship

had sprung up between him and Mark, and the Major had dined twice in Grosvenor Place. Mrs. Cray shrunk into the shade, and drew her veil tighter over her face. He passed without seeing her, and Mrs. Benn, after taking a look out up and down the street, gave the door a bang after him.

Suffering a few moments to elapse, Caroline went to the door and knocked at it. Mrs. Benn had just reached her kitchen, and it went very much against the grain of that amiable lady's temper to have to go up again. Flinging open the door, she confronted the applicant, opposition written in every line of her face, in every movement of her working arms, bared to the elbow.

"I want to see Mr. Oswald Cray."

"You want to see Mr. Oswald Cray!" repeated Mrs. Benn, the tight and disguising veil completing her ire. "Well, that's modest! When folks come here they ask if they *can* see him — and that's pretty bold for young women. What might you want, pray?"

"I want *him*," angrily returned Caroline. "Is he at home? If so, show me into his presence."

Something in the refinement of the voice, in its tone of command, struck on the ear of Mrs. Benn. But she was at warfare with the world that evening, and her prejudices were unconquerable.

"I don't know about that. The other night a lady walked herself here, as bold as could be, and said *she* wanted to see Mr. Oswald Cray; and when I let her go in, it turned out that she had got some smuggled cambric handkechers to sell, and she kept worriting of him to buy for five-and-twenty minutes. 'Mrs. Benn,' says he to me afterwards in his quiet way, 'I don't want them sort of people showed in to me.' But how be I to know one sort from — — Oh, so it is you, is it, Joe Benn? I wonder you come home at all, I do! You have been two

mortal half-hours gone, and nothing but visitors a-tramping in and out. Perhaps you'll attend to 'em."

Caroline turned instinctively to the respectable-looking man who approached the door. "I wish to see Mr. Oswald Cray. My business is of importance."

"Certainly, ma'am. Is Mr. Oswald Cray alone," he asked of his wife.

"Yes, he is alone. And I should think he'd like to remain alone, if only for a moment's peace and quiet. He can't get no rest at his work, any more than I can at mine."

She stood before Oswald with her veil thrown back, her face working with emotion, her hands clasped. The table was between them. Benn had closed the door after showing her in, and Oswald, who was busy over some tracings, rose and stared in very astonishment. She gave a summary of her business in a rapid, breathless manner, as if fearing there would be no time left to tell it in. Mark had at length an opening of escape from the present misery, if he could only be helped to embrace it. A surgeon was wanted at Honfleur, and the place was offered to him.

Oswald pressed her to a chair, sat down, and questioned her.

"Why does not Mark come forward and show himself?" he presently asked.

"Come forward and show himself!" she repeated. "What, and get put into prison?"

"He must come, sooner or later. He cannot remain a proscribed man all his life. What end has he in view by remaining concealed? What does he promise himself by it?"

"I don't know."

"But Mark ought to know. He must be aware that there's an imperative necessity for his coming forward; that it is a thing there is no escaping. What does he wait for?"

"He says he wants the storm to blow over first."

"The storm will not blow over. Were Mark to hide himself for ten years, and then appear, it would only raise itself again. The very best thing that he can do is to appear and face it."

"Then he never will — at least, not yet awhile. And, Oswald, I don't think you are a brother if you can wish him to do it. But I did not come here to discuss *that*," she added. "I came to ask if you would lend *me* — me, not Mark — the trifle necessary to take us over the water. I will pay you back again if I have to save it up by sixpences."

She betrayed more restlessness of manner than Oswald had ever observed. Since her entrance she had been incessantly taking off and putting on the left-hand glove. He thought her changed. Her face looked worn, her eyes anxious.

"It would be doing you no kindness, Mrs. Cray. Believe me, the only plan open to Mark is to come forward and meet the company. His stopping away makes things worse. Major Pratt was here just before you came in, asking if I could give him news of Mark. I am tempted to wish often that I had no connection with him. *Tell him to face this.*"

"I will not tell him," she answered, her cheeks crimson, her violet-blue eyes shining with a purple light. "If you will not advance me these poor few pounds that I plead to you for, there'll be nothing for us but to lie down and die. I have not" — she paused, struggling with her emotion — "I have not had a proper meal these three months; I feel often sick with want. Sometimes I wish I was with Uncle Richard."

Oswald hesitated, whether to ring at once for refreshment or to wait until her emotion had spent itself. He compassionated *her* with his whole heart.

"What would ten or twenty pounds be to you?" she resumed. "Ten might take us there; twenty would seem like a fortune. *Won't* you give us a chance of life?"

"It is not the money I think of; it is not indeed, Mrs. Cray. But Mark ought not to go to Honfleur while these clouds are hanging over him."

"*Let* me have the money," she pleaded; "let me have it. I don't want you to give it me to-night, only to promise it to me. Uncle Richard would have done as much for you."

What was he to do? What would you have done, my reader? Upright, honourable, just though he was, he did not resist those tearful eyes, those pleading hands, and he promised her the money that would carry Mark Cray farther and farther away from his creditors.

"And now what will you take?" he asked, ringing the bell.

"Nothing. I don't think I am as strong as I was; and in moments of excitement, I feel unable to touch bit or drop. Wine? no, I am not strong, I say; I am not used to wine now; only half a glass of it, and I should hardly walk home."

He did not intend that she should walk, he told her; and he induced her to take a very little wine, but she could not eat. Then he gave her his arm down stairs.

Mrs. Benn met them in the hall. Caroline hastily drew her veil over her face, but not before the woman had caught a glimpse of her features. Oswald let himself out at the door, and shut it after him, and Mrs. Benn backed against the wall to recover her amazement.

"Mrs. Cray! — his brother's wife! — them that are in hiding! And the last time she was here it was in a coach and four, as may be said, with her feathers in her bonnet and her satins on her back! What a world this is for change — and

work! Yes she *have* just gone out, that there lady, Joe Benn, and the master with her. And you not up to open the door!"

CHAPTER XXI.

A New Home.

It was an exquisite scene; one of the very prettiest in Normandie. The old town, with its aged and irregular buildings rising one over the other like hanging gardens; the large expanse of water, clear as a sheet of glass, bright with the early sun, stretching out underneath as far as the eye could see; the hills on the right, with their clustering trees and their winding road, leading to the nestling houses in the village of St. Sauveur; Harfleur opposite, standing as a background to the plain of crystal, with its old castle (or what looks like one) conspicuous, and its gentle mounts green and picturesque; Havre lying next it almost side by side, with its immensity of buildings and its long harbour; — these were what may be called the prominent parts of the canvas, but were you looking at it, you might find the minuter points of the filling-in even more interesting. The whole made a magnificent tableau, which, once seen, must rest upon the charmed mind for ever.

The Hôtel du Cheval Blanc, situated at one end of the town, was perhaps the best spot in all Honfleur for admiring this panorama — unless, indeed, you mounted the heights above. Standing in one of the end rooms of this hotel on the second floor, whose windows commanded two sides of view, the town and the water, was a gentleman whom you have met before. You could not have mistaken it for anything but a French room, with its bare floor, its tasty curtains, and its white-covered chairs. The tables had marble tops, hard and

ugly, but the piano opposite to the fire-place was of tolerable tone.

It was the best of the two sitting-rooms in the hotel; better than the one on the first floor underneath, because these windows were low and cheerful, and those were high and grim. This room and a chamber into which it opened (whose intervening door could never be got to shut, and if shut couldn't be got to open) looked right over to Harfleur. For the matter of that, the room opened into two chambers, but the one was closed up just now, and we have nothing to do with it. Like most French rooms, it seemed made up of doors and windows.

The gentleman standing at the window was Mark Cray. Resident at Honfleur more than a month now, this was the first time he had been called in to see a patient. A traveller had been taken ill at the Cheval Blanc in the middle of the night, had asked if there was an English doctor in the place, and Mark was summoned.

It was rather a serious case, and Mark had not left him yet. The door between the rooms was open, but Mark kept as still as a mouse; for the patient, he hoped, was dropping into a dose. Mark had occupation enough, looking out on the busy scene. It was high tide, and the harbour, close on which the hotel was built, was alive with bustle. Fishing boats were making ready to go out; fishing boats were tiding in, bearing their night's haul. The short pier underneath had quite a crowd on it for that early hour; women with shrill tongues, men with gruff ones, who were waiting to tow in a merchant vessel drawing near; idlers only looking on, — their babel of voices came right up to Mark, and had he been rather more familiar with the Norman tongue, he might have known what all the gabbling was about. A quiet wedding-party, three men and three women, were taking a walk on the

pier, two and two, after the performance of the early ceremony; or perhaps it had been performed the previous day, and this one was the continuance of the holiday, — one never knows; the gala caps on the women's heads — such caps as we may see in pictures — flapped out their extraordinary wings: a sober, middle-aged, well conducted wedding-party of humble life. They probably came, Mark thought, from some few miles inland, where the water and the boats were not every-day objects, as at Honfleur, for their interest in these seemed intense. Every minute there was something new, as is sure to be the case with a full tide at early morning: now, an entanglement of boats at the entrance of the harbour; now, the snapping of a cord and deafening noise in consequence; and now a flat barge, heavily laden, went rounding off to the Seine, to toil up between its green banks as far as Rouen.

Suddenly, a noise as of the waters being cut through arose, and Mark, who was watching the toiling barge and wondering what she was laden with, turned his head to the left. The steamer plying from Havre was coming in — had almost reached the port. She had made a fine passage that morning: not twenty-five minutes yet had passed, since she steamed out of Havre. The coming in, and the going out again of these steamers, twice each way in the summer days, is the great event in Honfleur life.

In she came to the harbour, swiftly and steadily, rounded the point under the hotel windows, and moored herself in her place, opposite the hotel entrance. Mark Cray changed his window now.

Quitting that at which he had been standing, he quietly opened the one which faced the town and inner harbour, and leaned out to watch the disembarking of the steamer's live freight.

"I wonder how many of them will be coming into the hotel to breakfast?" he murmured. "I wish —"

What he was about to wish was never known. A voice from the inner room interrupted him. And it was not by any means a feeble voice, but rather a loud one.

"Mr. Cray!"

Mark hastened in. To his surprise he saw his patient, whom he had left in hope of sleep, out of bed and dressing himself. Mark, as medical attendant, made a strong remonstrance.

"I feel a great deal better," was the answer. "I can't lie any longer. Is not that the boat come in?"

"Yes," said Mark. "But —"

"Well, I told you I must go back by her to Havre, if I possibly could. Necessity has no choice."

Mark could only look his amazement. The boat would go out again almost directly, and the patient stood little chance of having time for breakfast. "You cannot go by this boat," he said. "There'll be another later in the day."

"I can't wait for that. I must be away from Havre by an early train."

"But I — I don't know that I can pronounce you out of danger," remonstrated Mark, hardly able yet to realise the fact that a gentleman, thought to be dying in the night, was dressing himself to go off by a steamer in the morning.

"I know these attacks of mine are bad — dangerous, I suppose, while they last; but, once over, I am well, except for weakness. And the long and the short of it is, I must go to Havre by the return boat."

Mark Cray saw that further objection would be useless. The chamber-man (I can't help it if you object to the appellation; the hotel had no women servants) came in with warm water, and the traveller ordered a cup of coffee to be ready by

the time he got down. Mark went back to the sitting-room. He would stay and see him on board.

The steamer's first bell had rung when the traveller came forth. Mark caught up his hat and gloves. "I hardly know what I am indebted to you," said the stranger, placing a thin piece of paper in his hand. "Perhaps that will cover it."

It was a hundred-franc note. Mark would have given it back, badly though he wanted money. It was too much; altogether too much, he exclaimed.

"No," said the stranger. "I don't know what I should have done without you; and you have stayed with me the night. That's being attentive. I was taken ill once before in the night at an hotel in France, where there happened to be an English doctor in the town, and they got him to me. But he was gone again in an hour, and in fact seemed to resent having been disturbed at all. I didn't pay *him* more than I was obliged."

"Ah, he had plenty of practice, perhaps," cried Mark, rather too impulsively. "But indeed this is paying me a great deal too much. I don't like to take it."

"Indeed it is not, and I hope you will accept my thanks with it," was the conclusive answer.

Mark Cray saw the traveller on board the boat, watched it move off, turn, and go steaming down the port. And then he made the best of his way home, the hundred-franc note in his pocket seeming to be a very fairy of good fortune.

They had come to Honfleur the latter end of April; this was the beginning of June; and poor Mark had not found a single patient yet. Mr. Barker had been there to receive them on their arrival. How Barker contrived to live, or whence his funds came, Mark did not know, but he always seemed flourishing. There are some men who always do seem flourishing, whatever may be their ups and downs.

Barker was in Paris now, apparently in high feather, his letters to Mark boasting that he was getting into "something good."

Mark ran all the way home; his lodgings were not far, near the ascent of the Mont Joli. Could scenery have supplied the place of meat and drink, then Mark Cray and his wife might have lived as epicures, for nothing could well be more grandly beautiful than the prospect seen from their windows. But, alas! something besides the eyes requires to be ministered to in this world of wants.

It was a small house with a garden before the door, and was tenanted by a widow lady and her servant. Mark and his wife occupied a small sitting-room in it and a bed-chamber above; opening from the sitting-room was a little place about four feet square, which served for kitchen, and was let to them with the rooms. They waited on themselves; it is rare indeed that attendance is furnished with lodgings in France. But madame's servant was complaisant, and lighted their fire and did many other little things.

Caroline was in the bed-room, dressing, when Mark returned; — dressing in that listless, spiritless manner which argues badly for the hope and heart. It was a pity their expectations in regard to Honfleur had been so inordinately raised, for the disappointment was keen, and Caroline perhaps had not strength to do battle with it. She had pictured Honfleur (taking the impression from Barker's letters and Mark's sanguine assumptions) as a very haven of refuge; a panacea for their past woes, a place where the English patients, if not quite as plentiful as blackberries, would at least be sufficient to furnish them with funds to live in comfort. But it had altogether proved a fallacy. The English patients held aloof. In fact, there were no English patients, so far as they could make out. Nobody got ill; or, if they did get ill,

they did not come to Mark Cray to be cured. Tribulation in the shape of petty embarrassment was coming upon them, and Caroline began to hate the place. She was weary, sick, sad; half dead with disappointment and *ennui*.

Unfortunately, there was becoming a reason to suspect that something was radically wrong with Caroline. Not that she thought it yet; still less Mark. Dr. Davenal had surmised that her constitution was unsound.

During the time of their sojourn at Chelsea, where Mr. Dick Davenal came so suddenly upon them, and Mark was accustomed to go out to take the air adorned with blue spectacles and a moustache, Caroline, in undressing herself one night, found — or fancied that she found — a small lump in her side, below the ribs. She thought nothing whatever about it, it was so very small; in fact, it slipped from her memory. Sometime afterwards, however, she accidentally touched her side and felt the same lump there again. This was of course sufficient to assure her that it was not fancy, but still she attached no importance to it, and said nothing. But the lump did not go away; it seemed like a little kernel that could be moved about with the finger; and in the week following their arrival at Honfleur she first spoke of it to Mark. Mark did not pay much attention to it; that is, he did not think there was any cause to pay attention to it; it might proceed from cold, he said, or perhaps she had given herself a knock; he supposed it would go away again. But the lump did not go away, and Caroline had been complaining of it lately.

On this past night — or rather morning — when Mark was at the hotel with the patient to whom he was called, Caroline had been recreating her imagination with speculations upon what the lump was, and what it was likely to come to. Whether this caused her to be more sensitive to the lump than

she had been before, or whether the lump was really beginning to make itself more troublesome, certain it was that her fears in regard to it were at length aroused, and she waited impatiently for the return of her husband.

"Mark, this lump gets larger and larger. I am certain of it."

It was her greeting to Mark when he entered and came up to the chamber. She turned her spiritless eyes upon him, and Mark might have noted the sad listlessness of the tone, but that it had become habitual. He made no reply. He was beginning himself to think that the lump got larger.

"And it pains me now, — a sort of dull aching. I wonder if it's coming to anything. Just feel it, Mark."

Mark Cray drew her light cotton dressing-gown tight across the place, and passed his fingers gently over and over it. He was not so utter a tyro in his profession as to be ignorant that the lump might mean mischief. Caroline, with most rapid quickness of apprehension, noted and did not like his silence.

"Mark! what is it? What's going to be the matter with me?"

"Nothing, I hope," replied Mark, speaking readily enough now. "It will go away, I daresay. Perhaps you have been fidgeting with it this morning."

"No, I have not done that. And if the lump meant to go away, why should it get larger? It *does* get larger, Mark. It seems to me that it has nearly doubled its size in the last week."

"I think it is a little larger," acknowledged Mark, feeling perhaps that he could not get out of the confession. "How long has it pained you?"

"I can't remember. The pain came on so imperceptibly

that I hardly know when it first began. What is the lump, Mark?"

"I can't tell."

"You can't tell?"

"I can't tell yet. Sometimes lumps appear and go away again, and never come to anything."

"And if they do come to anything, what is it that they come to?"

"Oh, sometimes one thing and sometimes another," answered Mark lightly.

"Can't you tell me what the things are?" she rejoined, in a peevishly anxious tone.

"Well — boils for one thing; and tumours."

"And what becomes of these tumours?" she quickly rejoined, catching at the word.

"They have to be taken out."

"Is it very painful?"

"Law, no. The pain's a mere nothing."

"And cancers? How do they come?" proceeded Caroline after a pause. "With a little lump at first, like this?"

"Cancers don't come there. You need not fear that it's a cancer. Carine, my dear, you must be nervous this morning."

She passed by the remark, hardly hearing it. "But Mark — you say you can't tell yet what it is."

"Neither can I. But I can tell what it is *not*. I'll get you a little ointment to rub on it, and I make no doubt it will go away."

Caroline was doing her hair at the moment. She had the brush in one hand, the hair in the other; and she paused just as she was, looking fixedly at her husband.

"Mark, if you don't know what it is, perhaps some-

body else would know. I wish you'd let me show it to a doctor."

Mark laughed. He really believed she must be getting nervous about it, and perhaps deemed it would be the best plan to treat it lightly. "A French doctor? Why, Carine, they are not worth a rush."

"I have heard Uncle Richard say the contrary," she persisted. "That the French, as surgeons, are clever men."

"He meant with the knife, I suppose. Well, Caroline, you can let a Frenchman see the lump if it will afford you any satisfaction. You don't ask me what has kept me out all these hours!" rejoined Mark, changing the topic. "I have had a patient at last."

"Yes, I suppose that. He was very ill, perhaps, and you had to remain with him."

She spoke in the wearied, inert tone that seems to betray an entire absence of interest. When the spirit has been borne down with long-continued disappointment, this weariness becomes a sort of disease. It was very prejudicial now, in a physical point of view, to Caroline Cray.

Mark took out the note. "See how well he paid me!" he cried, holding it to her. "I wish such patients would come to the Cheval Blanc every day!"

The sight aroused her from her apathy. "A hundred-franc note!" she exclaimed with dilating eyes. "O Mark! it is quite a godsend. I shall believe next in Sara Davenal's maxim: that help is sure to turn up in the time of need."

In the time of need! It was a time that had certainly come for them. The surplus of Oswald Cray's twenty pounds, remaining after the expenses of removal were paid, had come to an end, and neither Mark nor his wife had seen their way clear to go on for another week. It was in truth a godsend; more strictly so than Caroline, in her lightness, deemed.

But the money, welcome as it was, did not take the paramount place in her mind to-day that it might else have done. *That* was occupied by the lump. Caroline's fears in regard to it could not be allayed, and she insisted upon being taken to a doctor for his opinion, without any delay. Mark made inquiries, and found a Monsieur Le Bleu was considered to be a clever man. He proposed to ask him to call, but Caroline preferred to go to him, her reason being a somewhat whimsical one, as expressed to Mark: "If he has to come to me I shall think I am really ill." Accordingly they went that same afternoon, and the interview, what with Mark Cray's French and the doctor's English, was productive of some temporary difficulty.

They started after their early dinner. M. Le Bleu lived not very far from them, but in the heart of the town, and Mark began by calling him Mr. Blue, *sans cérémonie*. Mark had learned French at school, and therefore considered himself a French scholar. On the door was a brass plate — "M. Le Bleu, Médecin;" and a young woman in a red petticoat, grey stockings, and sabots, came to the door in answer to the ring.

"Is Mr. Blue at home?" demanded Mark. "Mossier Blue, chez elle?" continued he, trying to be more explanatory, in answer to the girl's puzzled stare.

"Oh, Mark," whispered Caroline, her cheeks flaming at this specimen of French. "Monsieur Le Bleu, est-il chez lui?" she hastily said, turning to the servant.

Monsieur Le Bleu was "chez lui," the girl said to them, and they were admitted. A little middle-aged gentleman in spectacles, with no beard or whiskers or moustache, or any other hair to speak of, for that on his head was as closely cut as it could be, short of being shaved, came forward. He asked what he could have the honour of doing for them.

"Speak English, Messeu?" began Mark. "Parle Anglishe?"

"Yas, sare," was the amiable response, as the doctor handed Caroline a seat. "I speak the Anglishe, moi."

"Oh then we shall get on," cried Mark. "Madame here, ma femme, it's for her. I don't think it's much, but she would come. That's my name" — handing in his card.

The Frenchman was a little puzzled by so much English all at once, and relieved himself by looking at the card.

"Ah, c'est ça, Meestare Cr—Cr—Craw," pronounced the doctor, arriving with satisfaction at the name after some stammering. "And Madame what has she?"

"Malade," briefly responded Mark. "Elle a une — une — lump — come in the — the (what's French for side, I wonder?) in the côté. Ici, Messeu," touching himself; "mais il est très petite encore; no larger than a — a — petite pois."

Clearly the gentleman did not understand. Mark had drawn him aside, so that they were speaking apart from Caroline.

"A-t'elle d'enfants, Madame?"

"Oh, oui, oui," responded Mark, at a venture, not catching a syllable of the question, the Frenchman seemed to speak so rapidly.

"Et combien? I ask, sare, how many; and the age of them; the age?"

"Three-and-twenty. Vingt-trois."

"Vingt-trois!" echoed the doctor, pushing up his glasses. "Mais, ce n'est pas possible. I say it not possible, sare, that Madame have twenty-three children."

"*Children!*" shouted Mark, "I thought you said *age*. She has not any children; pas d'enfants, Messeu. She found of it before we quitted England — avant nous partons d'Angleterre."

Monsieur Le Bleu tried hard to understand. "Where you say it is, sare, the mal? Est-ce que c'est une blessure?"

"It's here," said Mark, touching *him* now. "It came of itself — venait tout seule, grande at first comme the tête of an épingle, not much more; à présent larger than a big pea — a petite pois."

The doctor's ear was strained, and a faint light broke upon it. He had enjoyed the pleasure of conversing with English patients before; in fact it was mostly from them that he was enabled to shine in the language.

"Ah, je vois. Pardon, sare, it not a blessure, it a — a — clou? — a bouton? I ask, sare, is it a button?"

"It's a *lump*," returned Mark, staring very much. "A sort of a kernel, you know. Comprends, Messeu?" he questioned, in no hurry, perhaps, to make any worse suggestion.

The doctor gravely nodded; not caring to confess his ignorance. "When did he arrive, sare?"

"When did who arrive?"

"Him — the mal, sare."

"Oh, the lump. Several weeks back — quelques semaines, Messeu. Pas beaucoup de trouble avec; de pain! mais trouve nervous this morning, and — and — thought she'd like a doctor's opinion," concluded Mark, his French completely breaking down.

"Bon," said the surgeon, wishing Mark did not talk English quite so fast. "Madame has not consultayed a docteur donc, encore?"

"Only me," replied Mark. "I'm a doctor myself — docteur moi-même, Messeu."

"Ah, Monsieur est médecin lui-même," cried the doctor, making a succession of bows in his politeness. "That will facilitate our understandings, sare. Has Madame the good

— the *bonne santé de l'ordinaire*?" he continued, coming to a breakdown himself.

"*Santé de l'ordinaire*! — I wonder what that is?" debated Mark within himself. "*Vin ordinaire* means thin claret, I know. I no *comprendre* *Messeu*," he confessed aloud. "*Ma femme* eats and drinks everything."

"Is Madame — *je ne trouve pas le mot, moi* — is she *saine*, I would ask?"

"San!" repeated the puzzled Mark. "Why, you never mean *sane*, surely!" he exclaimed in astonishment. "She's as sane as you or I. What on earth put that in your head, *Messeu*! she doesn't look mad, I hope!"

"I no say mad," disclaimed *Messeu*. "I ask if she — ah, *voilà le mot, quel bonheur*! — if she healthy? — if she partake of the good constitution?"

A recollection flashed across Mark Cray's memory of a doubt he had once heard drop from Dr. Davenal, — as to whether Caroline's constitution was a healthy one. "*Elle a porté très bien*," was his answer to Monsieur, plunging into his French again. "This mayn't be anything, you know, *Messeu*."

"I not like these boutons though, *sare*."

"Which buttons?" demanded Mark.

"The buttons you do me the honour to consult for. *Je ne les aime pas, soit clou, soit tumeur* — *n'importe pour l'espèce*. In the place you indicate to me, it is like to be a tumeur, and she is obstinate."

"Who is, *Messeu*?" asked Mark, in doubt whether the incomprehensible Frenchman did not allude to his wife's temper.

"She herself," lucidly explained *Messeu*. "I have held cases that would not terminate themselves at all by any way, no not for the years."

"Oh, but this is not a case of that sort," said Mark, half resentfully. "A few simple remedies may disperse it."

"Yas, I hope," agreed the doctor. "I would demand of Monsieur if he has tried the sangsues?"

"The what?" cried Mark, who had not the remotest idea what sort of a thing "sangsues" could be. "No, I have not tried it."

"J'aime assez la sangsue, moi. She is a useful beast, sare."

Mark nearly groaned. Whatever had "useful beasts" to do with this lump of Caroline's? Useful beasts? "Is it a camel you are talking of?" he asked.

"A camel!" repeated the doctor, staring at Mark. "Pardon, I no understand."

Mark was sure he didn't. "You spoke of useful beasts, Messeu?"

"Yas, they have moche virtue, the sangsues. They do good to Madame: they bite her well."

Mark was never more at sea in his life. Roaming away in search of camels, his home perceptions were perhaps a little obscured in that moment. Bite Madame! What an earth was "Sonsues?"

"I speak of the little black beast, that long when she full" — pointing to his finger. "You call them litch — litch —"

"Leeches," interrupted Mark, with a laugh. "I could not understand, moi; Je pensé, Messeu, que vous — vous — speak of wild beasts."

"Yas," said the doctor complacently, "I thought you understand, sare."

"Bon pour Madame, vous dit, Messeu, the sonsues?"

"Je pense que oui. Mais — but I no say trop before the examen of Madame. I would see the hurt, me. I go to your house, sare, and meet Madame without her robe. I go to-

morrow at four of the clock after twelve, if that will arrange you."

"So be it," returned Mark, when he had puzzled out the words. "Je dis à ma femme que — que — it was of no use for her to call here, herself; you'd want to see her dishabillayed. Je vous merci, Messeu."

And when they were walking home, Mark said to his wife how very glad he was to find he had kept up his French.

CHAPTER XXII.

A Bell ringing out at Midnight.

I WONDER whether you remember that most charming weather we had in the October of that same year, 1861. The first fortnight of the month was more lovely than can be imagined of October; it was brilliant and warm as summer.

Toiling up the ascent of the Côte de Grâce, went Mark Cray and his wife on one of these delightful days. The word toiling would be misapplied to you, I hope, for the way is gentle, the ascent easy; but it was toil now to Caroline Cray. The past three or four months had made a great change in her: health and spirits had alike sunk. As the lump got larger — we may as well call it by its familiar name — the body got weaker, and she felt the fatigue of walking now. Mark and the weather's unusual beauty had tempted her out, and they had taken the way through the town to the Côte de Grâce.

Winding up the shady road — and the sun was too hot not to make the shade welcome — they gained the top. Caroline sat down at once on a bench that faced the sea: Mark stepped forward to the edge, dangerous enough if unprotected, and looked down. Was any panorama ever more beautiful? It happened to be full tide, as it was that morning when you saw him looking at it before — the same view, from the windows

of the Cheval Blanc. But the same view, extended, enlarged, altogether grander, from the height on which he now stood.

Mark Cray took a glass from his pocket, — it belonged to Monsieur le Bleu, with whom they were now passably intimate — one of those small but effective telescopes rather rare to meet with. Adjusting its focus, he swept it round the horizon. He turned it to the right, and saw the women winding up the hill paths on their way from Honfleur market, their unbecoming borderless caps of every-day wear quite plain to him. Opposite was Harfleur, flickering in the light and shade; underneath him, beyond the cultivated precipice, were the walks by the sea — if you call it sea — the road winding on afar, the bathing establishment with its seats, and its linen spread out to dry. Havre itself looked rather cloudy from local smoke, but its entrance was beautifully clear, and Mark put up his glass again to gaze at it. Vessels, great and small, were rounding the point. A large steamer, which he recognised as the London boat, was turning into it, her steam so full, seemingly so close, that he might have fancied he heard its hiss. A fine sailing vessel was being towed out, to commence her long voyage; she looked like an Indiaman. The steamer plying between Havre and Trouville had reached its midway passage; a little funnelled boat was bearing swiftly on in the direction of Fiquefleur bay; an ugly, black-looking yacht had pointed its nose towards the dangerous bar of Quillebeuf; one of the everlasting flat barges was moving imperceptibly up the Seine; smaller boats and more picturesque were coquetting on the *manche*, and the Honfleur steamer was coming on quickly, leaving Havre far behind her. Mark extended the glass in the direction of the extreme left, and studied the vessels in the distance. Not a breath seemed to fill their sails. The blue and clear waters of the Seine were not calmer than that sometimes turbulent sea: river, *manche*, sea,

were to-day still as a lake. A fair scene! none fairer throughout the department of the Calvados.

How familiar the scene had grown to Mark Cray, he could tell you now. His days unfortunately were days of idleness, and he had nothing to do but look at it from some point or other of the heights. Mark's fondly anticipated patients had not come to him: whether the handful of English stationary at Honfleur preferred Monsieur Le Bleu or one of his compatriots to attend them, or whether they were so disobliging as to keep in perfect health, Mark Cray never clearly ascertained. All he could be sure of was, that *he* was not summoned. His professional services had been called into requisition but three times, including the stranger at the hotel who gave him the large fee. An English maid-servant had come to him once to have a tooth drawn; she could not speak French, she said, and did not like to go to a chemist's shop for it; Mark drew it, borrowing his friend Monsieur Le Bleu's pincers — or whatever you call the things — and charged her three francs. He said five at first; but she slightly reproached him, said she could have had it done in a shop for one, and in fact had but three francs with her. So Mark took the three. The third time, he was called in to a gentleman who said he had lived in Honfleur six years and had never been ill yet. He had now got an attack of what he called "La grippe," which Mark interpreted into the gripes, utterly unconscious that *la grippe* in French means influenza in English. The patient soon got well, despite a little wrong treatment at first; and Mark's remuneration was ten francs. That was all he had earned, this ten francs and the three for the tooth, besides the present made him at the hotel.

How were they to get along? How *had* they got along? They, poor sufferers, looking to the past, could hardly tell. Barker, who was in Paris still, full of wild hopes as usual, had

sent Mark once a hundred-franc note in a letter and a promise of more; a little had come to Caroline from Barbadoes, for she had told of her woes; and so they existed somehow. Mark Cray was by no means one to sit down tamely and starve; any hopeless scheme, rather than that; but Mark was caged, as it were, at Honfleur, and did not see how to get away from it, or where to travel to. Under happier auspices that "lump" might not have got so large as it was now getting: had that Great Wheal Bang mine only sent its ore to market instead of getting drowned, it might never have shown itself at all; or at least, not for years.

Mark Cray lowered the glass and turned to speak to his wife, who was seated but three or four yards behind him. Towards her left were those enclosed and accommodating gardens of entertainment, where you might order a dinner and eat it *al fresco*, or where you might take your own basket of provisions and they would bring you drink from the house, wine, milk, beer, lemonade, or coffee, at choice. Behind her, looking beyond, rose the little Chapelle de Nôtre-Dame-de-Grâce, on whose interior walls were recorded accounts of devoted pilgrims who had toiled on crutches up to the shrine, and whose faith Our Lady had rewarded by an instantaneous cure, whereupon they went down rejoicing, leaving their crutches behind them, a memento of the miracle. On the right was the small building called, surely by courtesy, the Observatoire, where innumerable wonders might be seen for two sous. And on the near plateau close around, was many a bench similar to the one occupied by Mrs. Cray; the grass forming a carpet underfoot, the trees a shade overhead. A pleasant spot to rest in on a summer's day; a charming tableau to look upon in silence.

"Won't you come and have a look, Caroline? I don't think I ever saw the atmosphere so clear on a brilliant day."

She only shook her head by way of answer; wearily, despondently.

"The boat's coming in," he resumed. "Two minutes more, and she'll pass us. You'll like to see her go by."

"I can't, Mark. My side is paining me worse than ever. I must not walk up the hill again."

It was a very obstinate side, as M. Le Bleu would express it, a very persistent, provoking lump, and that renowned practitioner—who was really a skilful man, for all his obscure English—had formed his own opinion upon it. It baffled him and his remedies persistently. Even those highly-regarded bêtes, the sangsues, had tried their best to subdue it—and tried in vain. Evidently the effective remedy was not sangsues. The lump had had its own way all these months. It had been growing larger and larger, giving by degrees more and more pain. Monsieur Le Bleu had once hinted his doubts of a "tumeur fibreuse," and Mark had politely retorted that he was an idiot to fancy such things. What the end of it all was to be—of the disease, of the semi-starvation, of the next to impossibility to go on in Honfleur, and the equal impossibility to get away from it, of Mark Cray's little difficulty with England and the shareholders of the old company—would take a wiser head than either Caroline's or Mark's to tell."

This day has been noticed because it was a sort of turning-point in this persistent malady: not a turning for better but for worse. Whether the walk up the hill injured her—for perhaps she had grown really unfit for it—or whether the disease itself made a sudden leap onwards, certain it was that poor Mrs. Cray never went up the Côte de Grâce again. She walked home with Mark very slowly, and fainted when she got in. Mark did not like her look, and ran off for Monsieur Le

Bleu. It was only the fatigue, she said to them: but the next morning she did not rise from her bed.

Several weeks dragged themselves slowly on, Caroline growing worse and weaker. An idea arose to her — it may have almost been called a morbid fancy — that if her Uncle Richard were alive and at hand, her cure would be certain and speedy. From him, it was natural perhaps that her hopes should stray to other English doctors; not young men such as Mark, but men of note, of experience, of known skill; and a full persuasion took possession of her mind that she had only to go to London to be made well. It grew too strong for any sort of counter argument or resistance; it became a mania: to remain in Honfleur was to die; to go to England and the English faculty would be cure and life.

Mark would have gratified the wish had it been in his power; but how was he to find the money? But for Barker, they could not have gone on at all. He sent a trifle to Mark from time to time, and they managed to get along with it. Once, when they were at a very low ebb, Mark had written a pitiful account of their state to his brother Oswald, and a ten-pound note came back again. Ah! what a contrast was this to the prosperity that might have been theirs at Hallingham!

Winter had come now. December was in; its first days were rapidly passing; and so intense had grown Caroline's yearning for home that, Monsieur Le Bleu himself said to keep her would be to kill her. "It would only be the passage-money, Mark," she reiterated ten times in a day. "I should go straight to Aunt Bettina's. Angry as she was with us for leaving Hallingham, she'd not refuse to take me in. Mark, Mark! only the passage-money!"

And Mark, thus piteously appealed to, began to think he must do something desperate to get the passage-money. Perhaps he would, if he had only known what. But while Mark

was thinking of it, help arrived, in the shape of a hundred-franc note from Barker. Things were beginning to look up with him he wrote. Perhaps he meant this as an earnest of it.

"Divide it, Mark," she said, with feverish cheeks. "I know how badly you want it here: but I want it badly too. I want help, I want medical skill; divide it between us: fifty francs will take me over."

And so it was done. How willingly Mark would have given her the whole! — but it was impossible. How willingly he would have gone with her to take care of her on the voyage! — but that was impossible. Mark Cray might not show his face in London. He took her as far as he could, and that was to Havre. On the morning after the arrival of Barker's letter and its inclosure, they were off: and so great an effect had the knowledge, that she was really going, wrought on Caroline, that she seemed to have recovered health and strength in a manner little short of miraculous.

She walked down to the Honfleur boat; she would walk; she was quite well enough to walk, she said. As they turned out of the house the postman was approaching it, selecting a letter from his bundle.

"Pour Madame," he said, giving it to Mark.

It was from Sara: they could see that by the handwriting. Caroline thrust it into her pocket. There was not time for reading letters there; the bell of the starting boat had sounded over the town, and they and the man behind, who was wheeling Caroline's trunk on a barrow, had much ado to catch it. They read the letter going over. It was merely a friendly letter of news, the chief item of which news was, that they were expecting Captain Davenal and his wife hourly from India.

"Then, Caroline, they won't be able to take you in," was Mark Cray's remark.

"Oh, yes, yes, it can be managed," was her answer, so feverishly and eagerly delivered that Mark suspected she feared he might wish to detain her; and he said no more.

But now, when they reached Havre, Mark discovered that he and Caroline between them had made a very stupid mistake, as to the departure of the London boat. He afterwards found that they had inadvertently consulted the list of departures for November, instead of December. There was no London steamer departing from Havre that day.

They stood on what is called the English Quai, Caroline weak, sick, depressed. A check of this kind thrown upon one in her state of health, is a very despair. Opposite to them was moored a small English steamer; a board upon her, on which was inscribed "for London," indicating her destination. "I could go by that," she said, feverishly; "Mark, I could go by that."

"I don't think it is a passenger boat," was Mark's reply.

They advanced to the edge of the quai and looked down. Two or three men, apparently English, were taking bales of goods on board by means of a crane. "Is this a passenger boat?" Mark asked them.

"No, sir. She's for goods."

The answer was unmistakably English. A stout, middle-aged, respectable-looking man, who was seated across a bar, watching the men and smoking a pipe, looked up, and inquired of Mark why he asked.

It was the master of the vessel. They got into conversation with him, and told him their dilemma. He was a kind-hearted man, and he offered to convey the lady to London if she could put up with the accommodation. She was quite welcome to go with them, free of expense, he said, and his

wife had come the trip with him this time, so she'd not, as it were, be alone on board. How eagerly Mrs. Cray seized upon the offer, rather than go home again to wait a day or two for the regular boat, I'll leave you to judge.

She went at once on board, and the vessel got out of harbour in the course of the afternoon, the master saying they should make London on the afternoon of the following day. But there's no time to linger over this part, or to give any details of the voyage; it is enough to say that the passage, from unavoidable causes, was an unusually slow one, and they did not reach their destination in the Thames until late in the evening. It was a memorable day for us, that; Saturday the 14th of December; a day of sadness irreparable for our land. Not quite yet, however, had the hour of calamity come; and the astounding grief, half paralysing England with its suddenness, had not fully broken upon it.

It was getting on for ten o'clock before Mrs. Cray was able to leave the steamer. To present herself, an unexpected intruder, at Miss Davenal's at midnight, was not to be thought of. All the way over she had been revolving the news containing in Sara's letter, of which she had made so light to Mark: should Captain Davenal and his wife have arrived, she did not think there would be room for her; and the untoward lateness of the hour increased her difficulty.

There came a thought flashing into her mind, welcome as a ray of light. "I wonder if Watton could take me in for the night?"

Her kind friends, the captain and his wife — and very kind and hospitable they had been to her — had a cab called, and Mrs. Cray and her trunk were placed in it, a tide-waiter allowing the disembarkment. She was then driven to St. Paul's Churchyard.

Watton came out in a state of wonder. A lady in a cab

inquiring for her! Perhaps it was not lessened when she recognised Mrs. Cray: but Mrs. Cray looking so awfully ill, so greatly changed! Watton, always of a demonstrative temper, could not conceal her shock of dismay; and perhaps the woman's words first imparted to Caroline a suspicion of what her real state might be. Always with Mark, he could not detect the ravages in her face as a stranger detected them; and the recent voyage of course added its evil effects to her looks.

"Watton, could you take me in for the night?"

She was too fatigued, too worn and ill to enter upon her demand with introductory circumlocution. Watton only stared in reply. This, coupled with Mrs. Cray's appearance, momentarily took her wits away.

"I could lie on a sofa, or on a blanket put down on the carpet, anywhere just for to-night. I don't like to go on so late to Aunt Bettina's; they do not expect me, and will have gone to bed. And you know what she is, Watton."

"To be sure I can take you in, Miss Caroline," returned Watton, recovering herself partially, and warming to the poor sick girl. "Thirty hours in a steamer! My goodness! And they are horrid things always. I crossed over to Jersey once in my young days, and I shall never forget it. Of course you can't go on to Pimlico to-night. Bring in the trunk, cabman."

The trunk was placed inside the passage, the man paid and dismissed, and Watton was closing the street-door, when it was pushed against. She flung it open with an impatient word, and a gentleman entered. Watton was taken by surprise. "I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure. I thought it was the cabman wanting to stand out for another sixpence."

He passed her with a smile, glanced at Caroline and the

trunk, and was making his way up the stairs, when she again addressed him.

"Is there any fresh news, sir?"

"Yes, and it is not good, Mrs. Watton," he replied, turning to speak. "Report says that a telegram has been received from Windsor, stating that there is no hope; that the Prince is rapidly sinking."

His voice was low, his manner subdued; and he raised his hat with unconscious reverence while he gave the answer. Watton lost her breath.

"It may not be true, sir! it may not be true!"

"I trust indeed it is not."

"But, sir, was there not hope this afternoon?"

"According to the report that reached us, there was. Could the Prince only bear up through this one night, all would be well."

He passed up the stairs as he spoke. Watton led the way into a sitting-room at the back of the house, and Mrs. Cray followed her in perplexed silence, in eager curiosity, unable to understand the words she had heard.

That great and good Prince, whom England knew too little, and whom to know was to love, was indeed lying *in extremis* in the castle that had been his many years' home. On that calm, clear, soft December night, when the streets of London were alive with bustle and pleasure, there was a dying bed not many miles away from it, around whose hushed stillness knelt England's sovereign, England's royal children. The gracious and benignant Prince, the faithful consort, the loyal husband, the tender, anxious father, was winging his flight away; sinking gradually but surely from those loving arms, those tearful eyes, those yearning prayers, which could not keep him.

London had been shocked that day. Not so shocked as

she might have been; for perhaps not one living man within her walls realised to his mind the possibility of the worst. *Death!* — for *him!* It was impossible to contemplate it: and from the first duke in the land, down to the little pauper boys who sold for a penny the newspapers containing the bulletins, none did seriously fear it.

Mrs. Cray listened as one aroused out of a dream. The Prince ill! — ill unto danger! The Prince who had been associated in men's minds as one enshrined in a bright halo of prosperity, in the very sunshine of happiness! — who had looked down from his dizzy height on other men as if he stood above the world! It seemed incredible. Watton gave the details, so far as they were known to the general public: the few days' illness, the apprehensions excited on the Friday, the fluctuating accounts of that same day; the unfavourable news of the morning, the afternoon's opinion of the medical men at Windsor, that if the Prince could only bear up through that one night — the night now entered upon — all would be well. And now the latest tidings were that he was sinking!

Mrs. Cray forgot her own weakness, her fatigue, in these all-absorbing tidings. But it was as impossible for her to believe in the worst for *him* as it had been for the public. A few minutes of awe-struck consternation, and hope reasserted its supremacy in her heart. Nay, not only hope, but a certainty that it "would be well." I honestly believe that such was the prevailing feeling in every breast. It was so hard, it was so *hard* to look upon the reverse side of the picture.

"We had heard nothing of this at Honfleur!"

"And we can't be said to have heard much of it here until to-day," was Watton's answer. "It has come upon us with startling suddenness. Oh, if we can but get better tidings in the morning!"

"We shall be sure to do that, Watton," said Caroline, in a low, hopeful tone. "Death surely could not come to *him*."

Watton made her some tea, and she sat over the fire in the sitting-room while she drank it. She could not eat: generally her appetite was good, but fatigue and excitement had taken it away to-night. She told of her residence in the French town, she hinted slightly at their want of success, and Watton looked grave as she spoke of her side.

"You think the London doctors can cure you, Miss Caroline?" — for the old name came far more familiar to Watton than the new one.

"I did think so," replied Caroline, feeling that the strong conviction of this, which had amounted to a disease in Honfleur, had in some unexplainable manner gone out of her. "I seem not to be sure of it, as I was before I came."

"And shall you make a long stay in London?"

"About a week. I have come for advice only, not to stay to be cured. Aunt Bettina's is no house for me; and perhaps I cannot even stay there at all. Captain Davenal and his wife may have arrived."

She heaved a sigh of weary despondency. Watton urged her to retire; but Caroline felt at rest in the easy chair, and still sat on. It was so long since she had seen a home face, or conversed with a home tongue.

"Who was that gentleman who passed us as I was coming in?" she asked, "he who spoke of the Prince?" And Watton replied, that it was Mr. Comyng, a junior partner of the house, and the only one of the partners who resided there.

It wanted scarce a quarter to twelve when Caroline at length went up stairs to a very high bedroom. Whether it was Watton's room or not, Caroline did not know, but it had been made cheery. The curtains and bed were white and

pleasant-looking, and a fire sparkled in the grate. Watton would have stayed with her to help her undress, but Caroline preferred to be alone.

When left to herself, she drew aside the window-curtains, and saw that the room faced the front: there stood old St. Paul's, grim and formidable, and apparently so close to her that she might have fancied it within a leap. Letting the curtain remain open, she sat down at the fire, before which was drawn a chair as easy as the one down stairs.

She sat with her head pillowed on the high arm, gazing at the blaze, and musing over present events. Their strangely uncertain life at Honfleur, poor Mark's position and poverty, her own malady and the curious manner in which she had lost that eager faith in the result of her journey, her reception on the morrow by Miss Davenal — and with all these thoughts were mingled more prominently the tidings which had greeted her since her entrance.

Unconsciously to herself, she dropped into a dose. It was a very foolish thing to do, of course, for she would have been much better in bed; but none of us are wise always. She dozed placidly; and the first thing that in the least aroused her, and that only partially, was the booming out in her ear of a deep-toned bell.

"St. Paul's clock striking twelve," was the supposition that crossed her mind in its state of semi-sleep. But ere many minutes had gone by, she became alive to the fact that the striking did not cease, that the strokes of the bell were tolling out fast and loud, as — as — a *death-bell* strikes out.

It has not been the fate of many to hear the bell of St. Paul's Cathedral strike out at midnight. Those who *have* will never forget it during life. Never, never will it be forgotten by those few who heard it as it went booming into the air on

that still December night, bearing forth its message of woe to the startled hearts of the Metropolis.

For a brief moment Mrs. Cray wondered what was the matter. She sprung out of her chair and stood staring at the edifice, as if in mute inquiry of what it meant. And then — when she remembered what had been said that night — and the recollection flashed on her with that heart-sickness that generally accompanies some awful terror — she opened the window and leaned out.

Three or four persons were standing underneath, motionless, still, as if they had collected there to gaze at the dark cathedral, to listen to the booming bell. “What is it?” she called out. “What does it mean?”

Her voice, raised by excitement to unnatural strength and clearness, was heard distinctly. Those standing below looked up. In one of them she thought she recognised Mr. Comyng. He was standing bare-headed, his hat in his hand, and his solemn answer came up to her in the stillness of the night.

“Prince Albert’s gone.”

A moment of bewildering suspense, while the mind refused to admit the dreadful truth, and Caroline Cray turned sick and faint. And then the sobbing cry burst from her heart and lips — a cry that was to find its echo from thousands and thousands as the hours went on —

“Oh, the Queen! the Queen! May God help and support the Queen!”

CHAPTER XXIII.

A Desolate Night.

Yes, he was gone. Great Britain rose on the Sunday morning to the news, for the telegraphs were at work, and the tidings were carried through the length and breadth of the land. And people did not believe it. It could not be! Why, it seemed but yesterday that he had come over in the flower of youth and promise, to wed the fair young queen! Dead! Prince Albert dead! None of you have forgotten the wide gap in the litany, that Sunday morning; the pale lips of the clergymen, compelled to make it; the quivering, breathless hearts that answered to it. But for the remembrance that God's ways are not as our ways, how many of those startled and grieved hearts would have felt tempted to question the *why* of the stroke, in their imperfect wisdom.

But to return to Caroline Cray, for the night was not yet over, and the bell was ringing out. When the first immediate shock had passed, she quitted the window and leaned her head upon the counter-pane. A solemn awe had laid hold of her, and she felt as she had never felt in all her life. Her whole soul seemed to go up in — may I dare to say? — heavenly commune. It was as if heaven had opened — had become very near. I may be mistaken, but I believe this same feeling was experienced by many in the first startling shock. This was so entirely unlike an ordinary death; even of one of our near and dear relatives. Heaven seemed no longer the far-off mysterious place she had been wont to regard it, but a *home*, a refuge, all near and real. It had opened and taken him in; in his early manhood; in his full usefulness; in England's need; when that wife and royal lady had learned to lean upon him; when his sons and his daughters

were growing up around him, some of them at the moment in other lands, out of reach of the loving farewell of his aching heart; with his mission here — it so seemed — only half fulfilled! — it had taken him in before his time, and gathered him to his rest. He did not seem to have gone entirely away; he was only hidden beyond reach and sight for a little while; that same refuge would open for her, Caroline, and others; a little earlier, a little later, and she and all would follow him. Heavy as the blow was in itself, incapable as she was of understanding it, it yet seemed an earnest of the overruling presence of the living God. Oh, what was the poor world in that night, with the strokes of the death-bell sounding in her ears, compared to that never-ending world above, that heritage on which he had entered.

Fatigue and emotion did their most on Mrs. Cray. In the morning she was unable to get up, and Watton wisely and kindly urged that she should not rise at all that day, but take a good rest, and go on to Miss Davenal's on the morrow. So she lay where she was, and listened to that gloomy death-bell, as it periodically gave forth its sound; and the bursts of tears, in her bodily weakness, could not be suppressed, but came forth repeatedly to wet the pillow, as she thought of the widowed Queen, the fatherless children.

The day's rest did her a great deal of good, and she rose on the Monday renovated and refreshed. A wish had come over her that she could see a doctor and learn her fate, before she went to her Aunt Bettina's. She had not come to town with the intention of consulting any particular surgeon; — indeed she hardly knew the name of one from another. Watton, when sitting with her on the Sunday night, had spoken of a noted surgeon living in Westminster, and Caroline remembered then to have heard Dr. Davenal speak of his skill: and she determined to go to him.

She went up in an early omnibus through the mourning streets. The bells were tolling, the shutters were partially closed, men and women stood in groups to converse, sadness pervading every countenance. The surgeon, Mr. Welch, was at home, but she had to wait her turn to be admitted to him.

He was not in the least like Monsieur Le Bleu, except in one little matter — he wore spectacles. A silent man, who looked more than talked; he bade Mrs. Cray tell her case to him from beginning to end in the best manner she was able, and he never took his spectacles from her face while she was doing so.

What she said, necessitated an examination of the side. It could be but a slight one, there, dressed as she was, but the surgeon appeared to form a pretty rapid opinion. She inquired whether it was curable, and he replied that he could not say upon so superficial an examination, but he would see her at home, if she would tell him where she lived. In her reply, when she said she had no home in London, it escaped her that her husband was a medical man, living in France.

“What part of it?” he inquired.

“At Honfleur.”

“Honfleur!” echoed the surgeon in an accent of surprise. “Is there sufficient practice to employ an English medical man at Honfleur? I should not have thought it. I was there a year or two ago.”

The consciousness of the truth, of what the “practice” was, dyed her cheeks with their carmine flush. Her eyelids drooped, her trembling fingers entwined themselves convulsively one within the other, as if there were some sad tale to tell. Her bonnet was untied, and its rich white strings (for Watton had affixed these new ones, and taken off the dirty ones) fell on her velvet cloak, nearly the only good relic left of other days. That grave gentleman of sixty, seated oppo-

site to her, thought he had never seen so lovely a face, with its fragile features, its delicate bloom, and its shrinking expression.

She raised her dark blue violet eyes, their lashes wet. Misfortune had brought to her a strange humility. "There's not much practice yet, sir. It may come with time."

He thought he could discern the whole case; it is that of *some* who go abroad: a struggle for existence, anxiety of mind and body, privation, and the latent constitutional weakness showing itself at last.

One single word of confidential sympathy, and Caroline burst into tears. Her spirits that morning were strangely low, and she had no power to struggle against emotion.

"I beg your pardon," she murmured apologetically when she could speak. "The fatigue of the long journey — the universal gloom around — I shall be better in a minute."

"Now tell me all about it," said Mr. Welch, in a kind tone, when she had recovered. "There's an old saying, you know: 'Tell your whole case to your lawyer and your doctor,' and it is a good injunction. I like my patients to treat me as a friend. I suppose the practice in Honfleur is worth about five francs every three months, and that you have suffered physically in consequence. Don't hesitate to speak: I can shake hands with your husband: when I was first in practice, I had hardly bread to eat."

It was so exceedingly like the real fact, "about five francs every three months," and his manner and tone were so entirely kind and sympathising, that Mrs. Cray made no pretence of denial. The practice was really not enough to starve upon, she acknowledged: none of the English residents at Honfleur ever got ill.

"But why did your husband settle there? Was it his first essay? — his start in life?"

"Oh no. He was in practice at Hallingham before that, in partnership with Dr. Davenal."

"With Dr. Davenal!"

The repetition of the name, the astonished tone, recalled Mrs. Cray to a sense of her inadvertence. The admission had slipped from her carelessly, in the thoughtlessness of the moment. Mr. Welch saw that there was something behind, and he kept his inquiring eyes fixed upon her. She felt obliged to give some sort of explanation.

"After Dr. Davenal's death, my husband gave up the medical profession, and embarked in something else. He thought he should like it better. But it — it — failed. And he went to Honfleur."

Her confusion — which she could not hide — was very palpable: it was confusion as well as distress. All in a moment, the name, Cray, struck upon a chord in the surgeon's memory. It was his custom to take down the names of his patients ere he entered upon their cases, and he looked again at the memorandum-book before him. "Cray."

"Your husband is not the Mr. Cray who was connected with the Great Chwddyn Mine!" he exclaimed. "Marcus Cray?"

She was startled to tremor. There was no cause for it, of course: the fact of its being known that she was Mark's wife could not result in their taking *him*. But these unpleasant recognitions do bring a fear with them, startling as it is vague.

"Don't be alarmed," said the surgeon kindly, discerning the exact state of the case. "I do not wish ill to your husband. I was no shareholder in the company. Not but that I felt an inclination for a dip into it, and might have had it, had the thing gone on."

"It was not Mr. Cray's fault," she gasped. "He would have kept the water out had it been in his power: its coming in ruined him. I cannot see — I have never been able to see — why everybody should be so much against him."

"I cannot understand why he need keep away," was the answering remark.

He looked at her inquiringly as he spoke. She shook her head in a helpless sort of manner: she had never clearly understood it either.

"Ah well; I see you don't know much; you young wives rarely do. Did you know Dr. Davenal?"

"He was my uncle," she said. "He brought me up. I was Miss Caroline Davenal."

Another moment of surprise for Mr. Welch. It seemed so impossible for a niece of the good and flourishing physician-surgeon to be so reduced, as he suspected she was — almost homeless, friendless, penniless.

She was struggling with her tears again. With the acknowledgment, her memory had gone back to the old home, the old days. She had scarcely believed *then* there was such a thing as care in the world; *now* —?

"You will tell me the truth about myself," she said, recovering composure. "I came to England to learn it. *Pray* don't deceive me. I am a doctor's wife you know, and can bear these shocks," she added, with a poor attempt at a smile. "Besides, I seem to *know* the fate that is in store for me: since Saturday night I have not felt that I should get well."

There was one moment of hesitation — of indecision. Caroline caught at it all too readily. "I see," she said, "there is no hope."

"I said nothing of the sort," he returned.

"But I am sure you think that there is not. Mr. Cray

thought there might be an operation: the French doctor said No."

"I cannot tell you anything decisive now. I will come to you if you will tell me where."

She gave him Miss Davenal's address. "I am so sorry to trouble you; I did not think of that. A few days and I shall go back to France."

"No," replied the surgeon. "You must not think of going back. It would not do."

"But I came. And it has not hurt me."

"You must not return."

He spoke in a tone so quietly grave that Caroline did not like it. Could it be that he knew she would be unable to go back? What would become of Mark? what would become of *her*? But she could not take up his time longer then.

"Is this right?" she asked timidly, as she laid a sovereign and a shilling on the table.

"It's quite wrong," said he. "Doctors don't prey upon one another. My dear lady, do you think I should take money from Dr. Davenal's niece? — or your husband's wife? Anything that I can possibly do for you I shall be most happy to do — and I am glad you happened to come to me."

She went out of the house. Why it should have been she could not tell, for certainly Mr. Welch's words had not induced it, but the conviction of a fatal termination, which had but dawned upon her before, had taken firm possession of her now. Lost in thought as she walked, she missed the turning by which she had gained the surgeon's house, and found herself at last in a labyrinth, far away from omnibuses and anything else available.

One directed her this way; one directed her that. Weary, faint, unfit to move another step, she found herself at last in

a street whose aspect seemed more familiar; but not until she caught sight of a door-plate, "Bracknell, Street, and Oswald-Cray," did she recognise it to be Parliament Street.

The temptation to go in and ask to be allowed to rest was strong upon her, but she did not like to do so, and walked on, longing to sit down on every door step. A little way further and she met Oswald Cray.

When the physical strength has been taxed beyond its power, especially in a peculiar case such as hers, any little break to it of mental excitement either renovates it for the moment, or destroys it utterly. It was the latter case with Caroline.

"Mrs. Cray!" exclaimed Oswald, in surprise. "I did not know you were in London."

She caught hold of something in her faintness. Whether pillar, railings, post, she could not have told. Her brow grew moist, her lips white. Oswald hastened to support her.

"I have lost my way," she gasped, leaning heavily upon him. "I missed it when I came out of the surgeon's, Mr. Welch. I came over from Honfleur on Saturday, Oswald: I came to consult an English doctor. I am dying."

"Dying!" repeated Oswald. "No, no, it is only a little faintness."

"Not *this*. I shall be better of this directly. It is my side. I'll tell you about it when the faintness has passed. I thought there was no hope for me. I know it now."

He was leading her gently, by slow steps, towards the house. "How is Mark? Is he here too?" he asked.

"Not Mark. He cannot come, you know."

"Is he getting on?"

"O, Oswald! getting on! There's no practice; and we

have not a penny piece; and — I — I am dying. Oh, if I had not to die abroad! If Mark could but come to me!”

“Where are you staying?” he asked, after a pause.

“Watton gave me shelter. It was late when the boat got up, too late to go on to my Aunt Bettina’s, and I called at Watton’s, and asked her to take me in. Oswald! — Oswald! —”

“What?” he asked, for she had dropped her voice, and her utterance seemed to be impeded by emotion.

“I heard the bell toll out for Prince Albert! I was close to it!”

“Ah!”

“Oswald! can you realise the fact that he is dead?”

“Not yet; scarcely yet. It is difficult to believe that *he* is taken, while we are left. It seems to us, in our finite notions, that there’s hardly a man in the realm but could have been better spared. But God knows best.”

His tone of pain had changed to reverence. There was no more said until they reached his door. He assisted her upstairs to the old sitting-room, the same sitting-room, with the same plans and charts and signs of work on its table. Oswald was a full partner now. Industry — trustful, patient, persevering, fair-dealing industry — had met with its reward. Did you ever know it fail? I never did.

Mr. Bracknell had virtually retired from the firm, leaving most of its profit to Mr. Street and Oswald Cray. Had Miss Sara Davenal been the daughter of the still-living and flourishing physician, on whom not a cloud rested, as was the case in the years gone by, Oswald could have asked for her hand now, and given her a home that even he would have deemed worthy of her.

Not having her, however, or any other lady, as a wife in prospective, he was content to let the home remain in abey-

ance, and lived in the old rooms, putting up with the comforts and agreeables Mrs. Benn chose to provide for him. The first thing Caroline did, on being placed on an easy chair, was to faint away. It was the only time she had fainted since the day in October when she walked to the Côte de Grâce. Mark Cray gave fatigue the benefit of the blame then, and it was probably due to the same cause now. When Mrs. Benn came up in answer to Oswald's summons, nothing could well exceed her amazement at seeing a lifeless lady lying in the chair, her bonnet hanging at the back by its strings, her gloves on the ground, and Mr. Oswald Cray rubbing her unconscious hands.

The first thought that occurred to Mrs. Benn was one of wonder how she got there: the second, that it was some stranger who had come to the offices on business, and had been taken ill.

"She's married, at any rate," remarked that lady, as she took up the left hand to chafe it. "But nobody would say so to look in her face. She's like a girl."

"Don't you know her?" returned Oswald, glancing at the woman. "It is Mrs. Cray; my brother's wife."

Mrs. Benn gave a shriek in her surprise. "*Her!* Why, sir, how she's altered! She looks fit —"

"Hush!" was his interrupting caution, for Caroline began to revive. "Can't we improvise a sofa or mattress, or something of that sort, to place her on?"

CHAPTER XXIV.

No Hope.

IN the same house at Pimlico, and in the same attire as of yore, save that the deeper mourning had been exchanged for rich silks, and the black ribbons on the real *guipure* caps for white or grey, sat Miss Bettina Davenal. She was not altered. She had the same stately presence, the same pale, refined features: she was of a stamp that changes little, and never seems to grow old. Sara had changed more than her aunt, and the earnest, sweet expression, always characteristic of her face, was mingled now with habitual sadness. She wore a robe of soft grey cashmere, its white collar tied with ribbon, and bows of the same ornamenting the lace sleeves shading her delicate wrists.

Miss Bettina stood, grandly courteous; Sara's cheeks were flushed, and she played with a key which had happened to be in her hand as she rose. Oswald Cray had come in unexpectedly, and was telling the story of Caroline; telling it rapidly, before he took the chair offered him. What with the extraordinary nature of the news, and Miss Bettina's inaptitude for hearing, it was a difficult business as usual.

"Come over from Honfleur in a goods boat, and it didn't get here?" exclaimed Miss Bettina, commenting on what she did hear — for Oswald repeated the particulars Caroline had disclosed to him on her revival. "And — *where* do you say she's lying, sir?"

"In my sitting-room in Parliament Street."

"The boat is?" questioned Miss Bettina, looking at Oswald keenly, as if she thought he had lost his senses. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Oswald Cray, I must have misunderstood."

"Caroline is lying there. Not the boat. I fear she is

very ill. She looks so; and she says she is suffering from some fatal complaint."

"Fatal mistake! I should think so," returned Miss Bettina. "If ever a man made that, it was Mark Cray, when he threw up Hallingham. But what's she come for? And why did she go to you instead of to me?"

But Sara had drawn near to Oswald. *She* had heard the explanation aright, and the words "fatal complaint" frightened her. "Do you know what it is?" she asked. "Is she very ill?"

"She is so ill, if her looks may be trusted, that I should think she cannot live long," he answered. "I came down to you at once. Something must be done with her: we cannot let her go back to Watton's. If you are unable to receive her, I will get a lodging —"

"But we are not unable to receive her," interrupted Sara. "Of course we are not. My aunt —"

"Caroline doubted whether you had room. She has just told me you were expecting Captain Davenal and his wife."

"We are looking for their arrival daily. Perhaps the ship may be in to-day. But they will not stay with us: Lady Reid expects them there. Did you not know Edward was coming?" she continued, quitting for a moment the subject of Caroline. "His wife's father is dead, and business is bringing them home. She has come into a large fortune."

"*Will* you let me understand what this matter is?" interposed Miss Bettina.

It recalled them to the present. But to make Miss Bettina understand — or rather hear — was a work not speedily accomplished. She even was aware of it herself.

"I am not myself to-day, sir," she said to Oswald Cray. "I have not been myself since yesterday morning. When the tidings were brought to me that — that it was all over with

that good Prince — I felt as I had never felt in my life before. It is not a common death, Mr. Oswald Cray, or a common loss, even had we been prepared for it. But we were not prepared. That Royal Lady and her children were not prepared; and we can but pray God, who tempers the wind to the shorn lamb, to love and help them."

"Amen!" responded the heart of Oswald.

When there was a real necessity for Miss Bettina Davenal's relenting in her severity, she did relent. She returned with Mr. Oswald Cray, and Sara went with them. On her way she spoke to him about the rise in his prospects, a rumour of which she had heard from Neal.

"Is it true?" she asked, bending forward to catch his answer, as he sat opposite to her in the carriage.

"It is true that my share has been considerably increased. Mr. Bracknell has retired."

"I suppose you will take a house now?"

"I think not," said Oswald. "Single men don't care to set up a house of their own."

"What men don't?"

"Unmarried men."

"Oh," said Miss Bettina. "Do you never intend to marry?"

Oswald laughed. "I have no time to think about it, Miss Bettina."

Miss Bettina did not catch the answer. "Sometime ago we had reason given us to think that you were about to marry. Did you change your mind?"

It was a home question. Oswald could have joked it off but for that gentle, conscious, bent face in the opposite corner. "We have to give up all kinds of fond dreams and visions, you know, Miss Bettina. Youth is very apt to indulge in such: and they mostly turn out vain."

"Turned out vain, did she? I must say I did not think she was in a position worthy of you."

Oswald opened his eyes. "Of whom are you speaking, Miss Davenal?"

"Of you. I was not speaking of any one else."

"But — the lady? You alluded to a lady."

"Oh, the lady. You don't want me to tell you her name. You know it well enough. That young Scotch lady whose brother was ill."

He breathed with a feeling of relief. A fear had come over him that his dearest feelings had been exposed to Miss Davenal — perhaps to others. Sara's colour heightened, and she raised her eyes momentarily. They met Oswald's: and she was vexed with herself.

"I shall most likely live a bachelor all my days, Miss Davenal. I believe I shall."

"More unwise of you, Mr. Oswald Cray! Bachelors are to be pitied. They never get a cup of decent tea or a button on their shirts."

"I am independent of buttons; I have set up studs. See," he continued, showing his wrists. "And tea I don't particularly care for."

Miss Bettina thought he was serious. "You'd be happier as a married man, with somebody to take care of your comforts. It is so different with women; *they* are happiest single — at least, such is my belief — and their comforts are in their own hands."

"The difficulty is to find somebody suitable, Miss Bettina. Especially to us busy men, who have no time to look out."

"True," she answered. But whether she heard or not was another matter. "What's Mark Cray about?" she presently asked, somewhat abruptly. "Doing any more harm?"

"I hear he is not doing any good. There's no practice in Honfleur."

"No politics?"

"Practice."

"Nobody in their senses would have thought there was. Perhaps he expects to get up a mining scheme there, and dazzle the French."

"If he is to do any good for himself, he must come over and get clear of the mining scheme here," observed Oswald.

Miss Davenal nodded her head and drew in her lips. It was not often that she condescended to make the slightest allusion to Mark Cray.

Mrs. Cray was asleep when they entered. She lay on the couch hastily improvised for her, dressed, and covered with a warm counterpane. One hand was under her wan cheek, the other lay outside, white, attenuate, cold. Miss Bettina Davenal took one look; one look only with those keen eyes of hers. It was quite enough, and an exclamation of dismay broke from her lips. Caroline opened her eyes and gazed around in bewilderment.

"Aunt Bettina! Have they brought you to see me? Will you take me in for a day or two until I can go back?"

"I have come for you," said Miss Bettina.

Until I can go back! Poor thing! what had she to go back to? A lodging in a foreign land that they might be turned from at any hour, for the rent could not be paid up; scanty nourishment, care, trouble, almost despair. Only Mark to lean upon, with his wavering instability; his vague chatter of the something that was to "turn up." Better depend upon a reed than upon Mark Cray.

Sara Davenal had drawn back for a moment, that the

shock on her own face might be subdued before presenting it to Caroline. Oswald passed round to her.

"Is she dying?" came the frightened whisper.

"Do not be alarmed," he answered. "She looked worse than this when I first brought her in. She has had a good deal of excitement and fatigue these last few days, and that tells upon her appearance."

"Yes — but — do you know there's a look in her face that puts me in mind of papa's. Of papa's as it was the night he died."

It was not often that Sara gave way to emotion. The moisture had gathered on her brow, and her hands were trembling. Oswald gently laid his hand upon her shoulder.

"*You* are not going to faint, surely, Sara!"

"No, no" — and the slightest possible smile parted her trembling lips. "I used to think I was very brave, but lately — at times — I have found myself a coward. I seem to become afraid at trifles," she continued in a dreamy tone, as if debating the question with herself why it should be so.

"Where's Sara? I thought I saw her."

Sara moved forward at the words. She suppressed all sign of emotion as she stooped over her cousin. Caroline was the one to show it now. She burst into tears and sobbed hysterically.

"If Uncle Richard were but alive! He could cure me."

"Don't, Caroline, don't distress yourself. There are doctors as clever as papa was."

"I kept thinking" — she turned her colourless face to Sara as she spoke — "I kept thinking at Honfleur of Uncle Richard; that if the old days could come back again, and I were at home with him at Hallingham in the old house as it used to be, I should be well soon. The thought kept haunting

me. And, Sara, I am sure if my uncle were alive, he *could* cure me. I shall never believe otherwise."

She paused. Sara knew not what reply to make. Miss Davenal did not catch the words, and Oswald leaned on the back of a chair in silence, only looking at her as she lay.

"Why should this conviction have haunted me? Uncle Richard was gone. Mark kept dinning in my ears that there were other doctors as good as Dr. Davenal, and at last I grew to think so too, because they were English. So I came over; I should have had a fever or died if I had not come; and now I see how foolish the hope was, for they *can't* cure me. Nobody could do it but Uncle Richard."

Miss Bettina had been bending her ear close to the invalid, and caught the sense of the words. "Why do you think nobody can cure you?"

"I feel that they can't. No: Uncle Richard's gone, and there's no chance for me."

They got her ready, Oswald helped her down to the carriage, and she was conveyed home. The only home she would henceforth know in this world. Dorcas stood in the passage, and looked on askance as she entered the house. *That* the blooming young bride whom she had received into the Abbey at Hallingham little more than two short years before!

Sara gave up her room to her as the most commodious one in the house, herself taking the chamber at the back of it, which had been occasionally occupied by Dick and Leo. Caroline looked round the room as she lay in bed, a curious, inquiring sort of gaze in her eyes.

"Have I been in this room before?" she suddenly asked.

She had never been in it. Her visits to Miss Bettina's,

during the prosperity in Grosvenor Place, were not sufficiently familiar to allow of her entering the bed-rooms. Sara told her she had never yet been in it.

"I seem to know it all; I seem to have seen it before. I suppose it's a sign that I shall die in it."

She spoke dreamily, alluding to a foolish superstition that she had heard in her childhood, and probably had never thought of since. It was not a very promising beginning.

Miss Davenal wrote a line to Mr. Welch, the surgeon, and he called in the evening. Caroline was better then, calm and cheerful. Her spirits had revived in a wonderful manner; but it was in her nature to be subject to these sudden fluctuations.

"Shall I get well?" she asked, when his examination was over.

"I will do what I can for you. The pain I think can be very considerably alleviated."

It was not a satisfactory answer. To most ears it might have savoured of considerate evasion, but it did not to Caroline's. "Must there be an operation?" she resumed.

"No."

She looked up at him from the depths of her violet eyes, pausing before she spoke again. "Monsieur Le Bleu said there must be an operation, if it could be performed. *If*, he said; he did not seem sure. It was the only chance, he said."

The surgeon met the remark jokingly. "Monsieur Le Bleu's very clever — as he no doubt thinks. I will see you again to-morrow, Mrs. Cray."

"But — stay a moment. Tell me at least by which day I shall be ready to go back. You can put me in the proper way of treatment, and I will pursue it over there."

"Not by any day. You must not think of returning to France."

She looked puzzled: there was a wild expression in her eyes. "Do you mean that I shall not be able to return at all?"

"Yes, I do. I say that you must not venture upon the shores of France again. We can't think of trusting you to the care of that clever French doctor, you know."

And before Caroline had recovered her surprise sufficiently to rejoin, Mr. Welch had left the chamber and was down in the drawing-room with Miss Davenal. She bent her head as she waited for his opinion.

"Do you wish for the truth, ma'am?" he asked.

"Wish for what?" repeated Miss Bettina, putting her hand to her ear.

"The truth."

"Do I wish for the truth?" she retorted, affronted at the question. "Sir, I am the daughter of one surgeon and the sister of another; I don't know to whom the truth may be told if not to me. It is *necessary* that I should know it."

Mr. Welch gave her the truth: that there was no hope whatever. At least, what he said was equivalent to that.

"And the operation that she talks of?"

"It cannot be performed. The case is not an ordinary one."

Miss Bettina was for a minute silent. "My brother, Dr. Davenal, always said Caroline had no constitution."

"Dr. Davenal was right," returned the surgeon. "Mrs. Cray is one — if I may form a judgment upon so short an acquaintance — who could never, even under the most auspicious surroundings, have lived to grow old."

"I remember a remark he made to me after Caroline's marriage with Mark Cray was fixed — that it was well she should marry a doctor, for she'd need watching. A fine

doctor, indeed!" continued Miss Bettina, irascibly, as she recalled Mark's later career. "If my poor brother had but known! I suppose it is all this disgrace that has brought it on!"

"It may have hastened it," said the surgeon. "But this, or some other disease, would inevitably have developed itself sooner or later. The germs were within her."

"And now what can be done for her?"

"Nothing in the world can be done for her, as regards a cure. We must try and alleviate the pain. That she will now grow worse rapidly, there's not a doubt. Miss Davenal, she must be kept tranquil."

It was all very well for Mr. Welch to say she must be kept tranquil; but Caroline Cray was one who had had an absolute spirit of her own all her life, and an excitable one. When Miss Bettina went up to her room after the departure of the surgeon, she found her in a wild state. Her cheeks were crimson with incipient fever, her eyes glistening. Sara, terrified, was holding her down in bed, begging her to be reasonable.

"I want to go back at once, Aunt Bettina," she exclaimed, throwing out her arms in a sort of frenzy. "He says I can't go back to France, but I will go. What does he know about it, I wonder! I was well enough to come, and I am well enough to go back! Be quiet, Sara! Why do you wish to prevent my speaking? You'll send me back to-day, won't you, Aunt Bettina?"

"I'll send for a strait waistcoat and put you into that," shrilly cried Miss Bettina in her vexation. "This is a repetition of the childishness of the old days."

"I won't be separated from Mark. Though he has been mistaken and imprudent, he is still my husband. It's a shame

that Mr. Welch should want to keep me here! Don't you be so cruel as to side with him, Aunt Bettina."

For once in her life Miss Bettina Davenal lent herself to an evasive compromise. She promised Caroline that she should go back when she was a little stronger, perhaps in two or three days, she said. And it had the desired effect. It soothed away the invalid's dangerous excitement, and she turned round on her pillow and went to sleep quietly.

But, as the days went on, and the disease — as the surgeon had foretold — rapidly developed itself, it became plain to Mrs. Cray herself that returning to France was out of the question. And then her tone changed. She no longer prayed in impatient words to be sent: she bewailed in impassioned tones that she must die away from her husband. One day, towards the end of December, it almost seemed that her brain was slightly affected, perhaps from weakness. She started suddenly from the sofa in the drawing-room, where she was reclining, and seized hold of the hands of her aunt in a wild manner.

"O Aunt Bettina! Aunt Bettina! if I had not to go over there to die!"

"Over where?" cried Miss Bettina. "What are you talking of, child?"

"*There*. Honfleur. If I had not to go! If I could but stop in my own land, among you, to the last! It may not be for long!"

Miss Bettina, what with the suddenness of the attack and her own deafness, was bewildered. "I don't hear," she helplessly said.

"They have got two cemeteries, but I'd not like to lie in either," went on Caroline. "Mark won't stop in the town for ever, and there'd be nobody to look at my grave. Aunt, aunt, I can't go over there to die!"

"But you are not going there," returned Miss Bettina, catching the sense of the words. "You must be dreaming, Caroline. You are not going back to Honfleur."

"I must go. I can't die away from Mark. Aunt, listen!" she passionately continued, clasping the wrist of Miss Bettina until that lady felt the pain. "It is one of two things: either I must go to Honfleur, or Mark must come here. I *cannot* die away from him."

The cry was reiterated until it grew into a wail of agony. She was suffering herself to fall into that excess of nervous agitation, so difficult to soothe, so pernicious to the sick frame. Sara came in alarmed, and learned the nature of the excitement. She leaned over the sofa with a soothing whisper.

"Dear Carine! only be quiet: only be comforted! We will manage to get Mark here."

The low tone, the gentle words, seemed partially to allay the storm of the working brain. Caroline turned to Sara.

"What do you say you'll do?"

"Get Mark over to London."

She thought for a moment, and then shook her head and spoke wearily, a wailing plaint in her tone.

"You will never get him over. He is not to be got over. I know Mark better than you, Sara. So long as that miserable Wheal Bang hangs over his head, he will not set his foot on English ground. I have heard him say so times upon times since he left these shores, and he will not break his word. He is afraid, you see. O Aunt Bettina!" throwing up her arms again in renewed excitement — "what an awful mistake it was!"

"What was a mistake?" returned Miss Bettina, catching the last word and no other.

"*What!*" echoed the unhappy invalid in irritation. "The quitting Hallingham; the past altogether. It was giving up the substance for the shadow. If we had but listened to you! If Mark had never heard of the Great Wheal Bang!"

Oh, those ifs, those ifs! how they haunt us through life! How many of us are perpetually giving up the substance for the shadow!

CHAPTER XXV.

Dreadful Treachery.

MR. MARK CRAY stood on the little bit of low stony ground that bordered the coast at Honfleur, just outside the entrance of the harbour. Mr. Mark was kicking pebbles into the water. Being in a remarkably miserable and indecisive state of mind, having nothing on earth to do, he had strolled out of his lodgings anywhere that his legs chose to carry him; and there he was, looking into the water on that gloomy winter's evening.

But pray don't fear that he had any ulterior designs of making himself better acquainted with its chilly depths. Men in the extremity of despair have been known to entertain such; Mark Cray never would have dreamt of it. There was an elasticity in Mark's spirit, a shallowness of feeling quite incompatible with that sad state of mind hinted at, and the most prominent question pervading Mark, even now, was, how long it would be before something "turned up."

Not but that Mark Cray was miserable enough; in a bodily sense, however, rather than a mental. It was not an agreeable state of things by any means, to have no money to go on with; to be wanting it in a hundred odd ways; to be told that if he did not pay up at his lodgings that week, he must turn out of them — and the French have an inconvenient

way of not allowing you to evade such mandates. It was not pleasant to be reduced to a meal or so a day, and that not a sumptuous one; it was not convenient to be restricted to the pair of boots he had on, and to know that the soles were letting in the wet; it was not cheery to be out of charcoal for the cooking *réchauds*, or to have but a shovelful of coals left for the parlour; moreover and above all, it was most especially annoying and unbearable not to have had the money to pay for a letter that morning, and which, in consequence of that failure, the inexorable postman had carried away with him.

Mrs. Cray's assertion — that her husband never would be got over to London so long as the formidable Wheal Bang threatened danger — proved to be a correct one. Mark had declined the invitation to go. News had been conveyed to him in an unmistakably impressive manner of the state his wife was in, and an urgent mandate sent that he should join her. Oswald only waited his consent to forward him funds for the journey; and poor Caroline hinted in a few private lines that he could choose a steamer which would not make the port of London until after dark, and could wear his spectacles in landing. All in vain. Mark Cray had somehow contrived to acquire a wholesome terror of the British shores, and to them he would not be enticed.

But — has it ever struck you in your passage through life, how wonderfully things work round? Caroline Cray was dying; was wanting her husband to be by her side and see the last of her, as it was only right and natural she should; but he — looking at things as *he* looked at them — was debarred from going to her; it was — judging as he judged — a simple impossibility that he should go. And this great barrier was turning her mind to frenzy, was making a havoc of her dying

hours, and increasing her bodily sufferings in an alarming degree.

It did seem an impossibility. If Mark Cray refused to venture to his own land so long as the Wheal Bang held its rod over him, it was next door to certain that he could not come at all. The Wheal Bang's shareholders would not relax their threats, except on the payment of certain claims, and who would be sufficiently philanthropic to pay them? Nobody in the wide world. So there appeared to be no hope of Mark's return; and the knowledge that there was not was entirely taking from Caroline Cray that tranquillity of mind and body which ought if possible to attend the last passage to the tomb: nay, it was keeping her in a state of excitement that was pitiable for herself and for all who beheld her. "If Mark could but come!" was the incessant cry night and day. "I can't die unless Mark comes."

You have heard that beautiful phrase, "Man's extremity is God's opportunity," and though it may strike you as almost irreverent to introduce any matter connected with Mark Cray as an exemplification of it, what came to pass was surely very like a proof of the truth of that phrase. Poor, erring, shallow-pated Mark! even he was remembered, neglectful as he had been of the Great Remembrancer.

While Caroline was lifting her hands to heaven with a vain cry in which there was no trust; while it seemed to all that there was no human feasibility of bringing Mark to England, that feat was accomplished in the easiest and most unexpected manner. Is it too much to say that a Higher Power was at work in answer to that poor woman's despairing cry? — though the human agencies employed were of the least exalted.

Mr. Barker, who was doing something grand and good (good in *his* sense) in Paris, found it necessary for his own

plans to pay a visit to London. And when there, he, to use his own phrase, got "dropped upon;" in other words he fell into the still outstretched hands of the Great Wheal Bang. That it was unexpected to himself, there's no doubt; for he was one of those men who believe implicitly in their own luck. Once in the mesh, Barker resolved to make the best of it. He had done nothing wrong, nothing that he could be punished for, and he carelessly told them that his only motive in not surrendering beforehand, was the bother of having the accounts to go over. Perhaps it really was so.

Mr. Barker's usual luck attended him now. After he was arrested and had been kept in durance for four days, the shareholders released him. The very shareholders themselves released him; the wronged, irritated, angry shareholders! Surely there was some charm in Barker's tongue! He talked them over to the most miraculous degree; and they took him out of prison, somebody going bail for the single debt on which he had been taken. Now that the thing had come to a crisis, Barker was as eager as they were to get it to a settlement, and he went to work with a will. A settlement, however, could not be come to without the presence of Mark Cray; Mark and Barker were both made bankrupts, and it was necessary that Mark should come over — or else never come over any more. So Barker wrote for him.

We left Mark standing on the water's edge. He was all unconscious of these doings at home which so nearly affected him; and he stood there speculating as to what news the letter, refused to him in the morning, contained. By some mischance Barker had neglected fully to prepay it; he had put on a four-penny stamp, but the letter turned out to be over weight by a hair's breadth, and of course the Honfleur postal authorities declined to give it up.

"What he's doing in London puzzles me," cogitated Mark,

— for he had recognised the writing on the letter as Barker's. "He told me he should not show himself there until the bother was over. What took him there now, I wonder?"

He stopped to single out a particularly shiny stone imbedded in the mud, lifted it up with his toe and kicked it into the water. A little shrimping-boat was making towards him, for it was low tide, laden with its spoils of the day. But it was not very near yet.

"It's well that she should have gone over as she did," he resumed, his thoughts reverting to his wife. "Heaven knows I should like to be with her; but she has all she wants there, and here she'd have nothing. I wish I could be with her! As to their saying — that Welch, or whatever his name is: I don't remember any great light of that name — that she's incurable, I don't believe it. That old Blue said the same, or wanted to say it — such jargon as the fellow talked to be sure! — but Blue's nothing better than an old woman. By the way, I wonder how long Blue intends to stop away! It's fine for these French fellows, taking a holiday when they choose, and leaving their patients to a *confrère*! I wish he had left *me* the *confrère* on the occasion, 't would have been a few francs, at any rate, in my pocket. The French wouldn't have had that, I suppose! their envious laws won't permit an Englishman to practise on them. Oh, if some rich countryman of one's own would but get ill!"

Mark Cray strolled a few steps either way, and halted again in the same place as before; he kicked six stones into the water, one after the other, the seventh was an obstinate one, and would not come out. Dull and dreary did the waves look that evening, under the grey and leaden sky. That's speaking rather metaphorically, you know, for in point of fact there are no *waves* off Honfleur, except in the stormiest of weather.

That Mark Cray's condition was a forlorn one, nobody can dispute. He had no friends or acquaintance in the town; a latent, ever-present consciousness of their straits, their position and its secrets, had caused him and his wife to abstain from making any, and one or two English residents who had shown themselves disposed to be friendly were repulsed at the onset. Not a single person within reach could Mark Cray apply to with the slightest justifiable plea of acquaintanceship and say, Lend me sixteen sous, that I may pay for a letter! Even Monsieur Le Bleu, as you have gathered from his soliloquy, was away. But Mark wished much to get that letter, and he was thinking how he could get it at this very moment as he looked out across the water to the opposite coast, to the dark cloud that hung over Harfleur.

"'Twould be of no use going to the post-office unless I took the money," he soliloquised. "They'd never let me have it without. Stingy old frogs! What's sixteen sous, that they can't trust a fellow? Help *must* come to me soon from some quarter or other; things can't stand in their present plight. That very letter may have money in it."

Grumbling, however, would not bring him the letter, neither would kicking pebbles into the manche: Mr. Mark Cray grew tired of his pastime, and turned finally away from it. He sauntered through the waste ground underneath the side windows of the hotel, his ears nearly deafened by the noise of the rough boys who were quarrelling in groups over their marbles, made a *détour* across the bridge, glanced askance at the slip of building, grandly designated Bureau des Postes, and turned off towards his home. It was a soft, calm evening in January, gloomy enough overhead, but in the west the sky was clearing, and a solitary star came peeping out, imbedded like a diamond in its grey setting. To a mind less matter-of-fact than Mark Cray's, that star might have

seemed as a ray of hope; an earnest that skies do not remain gloomy for ever.

Mark turned in at his little garden, and was about to ring gingerly at the house door; as one, not upon the most cordial terms with a frowning landlady, likes to ring; when a voice in the road greeted him.

"Bon soir!"

"Bon soir," returned Mark, supposing it was but the courteous salutation of some chance passer-by, and not troubling himself to turn his head.

"Et madame? quelles nouvelles avez-vous d'elle?"

Mark wheeled round. It was Monsieur Le Bleu.

Mark Cray extended his hand, and his face lighted up. In his desolation, even this French doctor was inexpressively welcome.

"I didn't know you were back, Mr. Blue: savais pas que vous retournez, messeu," added he, taking his customary plunge into the mysteries of French.

"I come from return this after-midday," said the surgeon.

"I ask, sare, if you have the news from madame?"

"She's worse, and can't come back," said Mark. "Plus malade. Not to be cured at all, they say, which I don't believe; pas croyable, messeu. I don't believe the English médecin understands the case. Non! jamais."

"Do I not say two — three — four months ago, me? I know she not curable. I feel sure what it was. You call it 'lump' and 'bouton' — bah! C'est une tumeur fibreuse. I say to you, mon ami, you — tiens! c'est le facteur!"

For the facteur had come up at an irregular hour, and this it was which had caused Monsieur Le Bleu's remark of surprise. The bureau des postes had despatched him to offer the letter a second time to Mark.

"Has monsieur got the money now?" he demanded in

quick French, which was a vast deal more intelligible to his French auditor than his English one. "If not, our bureau won't be at the pains to offer the letter a third time, and monsieur must get the letter from the bureau himself if he wants it."

What with the amount of French all at once and the embarrassment of the situation, Mark Cray devoutly wished the postman underneath the waters of the manche. That functionary, however, stood his ground where he was, and apparently had no intention of leaving it. He bent over the gate, the letter in his outstretched hand. Monsieur Le Bleu looked on him with some interest, curious to know why the letter had been refused. He inquired why of Mark, and Mark muttered some unintelligible words in answer, speaking in French so excessively obscure that the surgeon could not understand a syllable.

So he turned for information to the facteur. "Did Monsieur dispute the charge?" he asked.

"Not at all," replied the man. "It was not a dispute as to charge. The English Monsieur had no money. It was a double letter: sixteen sous."

"Ah, no change," said Monsieur Le Bleu, with a delicacy that many might have envied, as he turned his eyes from Mark Cray's downcast face. "It's a general complaint. I never knew the small change so scarce as it is: one can get nothing but gold. Hold, I'll take the letter from you, facteur, and monsieur can repay me when he gets change."

The surgeon handed the sixteen sous to the postman, and gave the letter to Mark. Mark spoke some obscure words about repaying him on the morrow, and broke the seal.

There was still light enough to see, though very obscurely, and Mark Cray's dazed eyes fell on a bank-note for £5. The surgeon had bade him good-night, and was

walking away with the postman: Mark Cray was only half conscious of their departure. Debt did not affect Mark as it does those ultra-sensitive spirits who can but sink under its ills: nevertheless, he did feel as if an overwhelming weight had been taken from him.

He rang at the bell, loudly now, feeling not so afraid of meeting madame, should she answer it. And he lighted his little lamp and read the letter. Read it almost in disbelief, half doubting whether its good news could indeed be true. For Mr. Barker had written all couleur de rose: and a very deep rose, too.

The Wheal Bang had come to its senses, and the worry was over. He, Barker, was upon confidential terms with all the shareholders, shook hands with them individually thrice a day. There would be no fuss, no bother; the affairs were being wound up in the most amicable manner, and Mark had better come over without an hour's delay, and help. The sooner they got it done, the sooner they should be free to turn their attention to other matters, and he, Barker, had a glorious thing in hand just now, safe to realise three thousand a year.

Such were the chief contents of the letter. Whether Barker believed in them fully himself, or whether he had dashed on a little extra colouring as to the simplification of affairs relative to the Great Wheal Bang, cannot be told. It may be, that he feared hesitation still on the part of Mark Cray and wished to get him at once over. In point of fact, Mark's presence was absolutely necessary to the winding-up.

Mark yielded without the slightest hesitation. If Mark Cray had confidence in any one living being, it was Barker. He forthwith set about the arrangements for his departure. It would take more than the five-pound note to clear all that he owed in Honfleur; so he paid madame, and one or two

trifles that might have proved productive of a little inconvenience at the time of starting, and got away quietly by the boat to Havre, and thence to London.

But, oh! the treachery of man! When the steamer reached the metropolis, Mark Cray walked boldly ashore in the full glare of day, never so much as shading his eyes from the sun with those charming blue spectacles you have heard of, never shrinking from the gaze of any mortal Londoner. Mark's confidence in the good-fellowship of the Wheal Bang's shareholders was restored, his trust in Barker implicit: if he felt a little timid on any score, it was connected with his clothes, which certainly did not give out quite so elegant a gloss as when they were spick and span new. Mark stood on the quay, after landing, and looked round for Barker, whom he had expected would be there to meet him.

"Cab, sir?"

"No," said Mark.

"I'll wait here a minute or two," decided Mark to himself. "Barker's sure to come. I wrote him word what time we might expect to be in — though we are shamefully late. He can't have been and gone again!"

Somebody came up and touched him on the shoulder. "Mr. Marcus Cray, I believe?"

Mark turned quickly. "Well?" said he to the intruder, a shabby-looking man.

"You are my prisoner, sir."

"What?" cried Mark.

"You are my prisoner, sir," repeated the stranger, making a sign to another man to come closer.

Mark howled and kicked, and for a moment actually fought with his assailants. It was of course a senseless thing to do; but the shock was so sudden. He had felt himself as secure, stepping on those shores, as any grand foreign am-

bassador could have felt; and now to find himself treacherously pounced upon in this way was beyond everything bitter. No wonder that for the minute Mark was mad.

"It can't be!" he shrieked; "you have no warrant for this. I am free as air; they wrote me word I was."

"Would you like a cab, sir?" inquired the official civilly, but not deigning to answer. "You can have one if you like. Call one, Jim."

A cab was called; the prisoner was helped into it and driven away — he was too bewildered to know where.

And that's how Mr. Mark Cray was welcomed to London. His rage was great, his sense of injury dreadful.

"Only let me come across Barker!" he foamed. "He shall suffer for this. A man ought to be hung for such treachery."

Mark Cray was, so far, mistaken. Barker was as innocent in the arrest as he was. An accident had prevented his going down to meet the Havre steamer.

CHAPTER XXVI.

The Gallant Captain home again.

CAPTAIN DAVENAL and his wife had been expected in England in December — as you have heard; but the time went on, and February was at its close before they arrived. They had been compelled to land at the Cape in consequence of the illness of Mrs. Davenal, and had to remain there some time. She had come into a very large fortune on the death of her father; a considerable portion of it was settled upon her, and the rest, a munificent sum, lapsed to her husband. So Captain Edward Davenal was once more at his ease in this world of changes.

Gay, handsome, free, sunny, it might have been thought

that not an hour's care had ever been upon him. No allusion to a certain dark episode of the past escaped his lips when he and his sister met: there were no signs that he so much as remembered such a trouble had ever been. They were the present guests of Lady Reid, and would remain so for as short time. It was Captain Davenal's intention to take a furnished house for a term. His leave of absence was for two years; but they did not care to be stationary in London the whole of the period. Sara was charmed with his wife: a gentle, yielding, pretty thing, looking so young as to be a girl still, and dividing her love between her husband and infant son, a fine young gentleman born at the Cape. A dread fear assailed Sara Davenal's heart as she looked upon her; for that curious matter, touching the young woman who claimed to be connected with Captain Davenal, had never been cleared up. Not since the previous December had Sara once observed her approach the house: but she had twice seen her in conversation with Neal at the end of the street, the last time being the very day of the arrival of Captain Davenal. It was altogether strange in Sara's opinion: if the young woman fancied she really had a legal claim of the nature she mentioned on Captain Davenal, why had she not asserted it openly? If she had no such claim, if she were an impostor, for what purpose had she put the claim forth? There had been no demand for silence-money; no attempt at extortion. However it might be, Sara's duty was plain, now Captain Davenal had arrived — to acquaint him with the circumstances.

"I have some papers to give you," Sara whispered to her brother at Lady Reid's, the night of his arrival there.

"Papers? O yes, I suppose so. I shall be with you to-morrow."

So he had not quite forgotten the affair. On the conclusion of the matter with Mr. Alfred King, Sara had sealed up

certain papers and receipts according to the written directions of Dr. Davenal; and these she waited to put into her brother's hand.

Mrs. Cray was with them still. She had taken to her bedroom entirely now, and was gradually dying. Mark was with her. His difficulty with the Great Wheal Bang's shareholder's, and particularly with that one cautious shareholder who had saluted Mark so unpolitely on his landing from Havre, was virtually over: Mark enjoyed liberty of person again, and things were in process of adjustment. Miss Davenal so far overcame her repugnance to Mark as to allow him to be in her house, but it was only in consideration of Caroline's dying state. They could do nothing for her. They painted her clothes with iodine as she lay on the sofa day after day before the chamber fire; it was the only thing that brought any alleviation to the pain.

It happened that Captain Davenal's first visit to the house was paid at an opportune moment, in so far as that his interview with his sister was free from fear of interruption. Miss Davenal had gone to Lady Reid's, to see and welcome the travellers. Neal was in attendance upon her, and Caroline was asleep. Mark Cray was in the city; he had to go there frequently, in connection with the winding-up of the company of the Great Wheal Bang.

Captain Davenal came in, all joyous carelessness, telling Dorcas, who admitted him, that she looked younger and handsomer than ever: and poor Dorcas — who was not young at all, and had never been handsome in her life — felt set up in vanity for a month to come. Sara was in the drawing-room. It was the first time of their being alone, and Captain Davenal held her before him and scanned her face.

"What has made you get so thin?"

"Am I thin?" she returned.

"Dreadfully so. I have been telling Dorcas that she's handsomer than ever, but I can't say the same of you. What is the cause, Sara?"

"I think people do get thin in London," she replied with some evasion. "But let me be rid of my charge, Edward."

She went to her bedroom and brought down Dr. Davenal's desk. To Edward's surprise, he saw that it was bound round with a broad tape and sealed. When Sara had placed the papers in the desk, received from Mr. Alfred King, she had immediately sealed up the desk in this manner; a precaution against its being opened.

"What's that for?" exclaimed Captain Davenal, in his quick way, as he recognised the desk and to whom it had belonged. "Did my father leave it so?"

Sara replied by telling him her suspicions of the desk's having been opened; and that she had deemed it well to secure it against any future inroads when once these papers were inclosed in it.

"But who would touch the desk?" he asked. "For what purpose? Was young Dick at home at the time?"

"Dick was not at home. But Dick would not touch a desk. I would not answer for Dick where a jam cupboard is concerned; but in anything of consequence Dick's as honourable as the day. I suspected Neal, Edward."

"Neal!"

"I did. I feel half ashamed to say so. Do you remember telling me that papa had a suspicion, or doubt, whether Neal had not visited some of his letters?"

"I remember it. I thought my father was wrong. Neal! Why, Sara, I'd as soon suspect myself."

"Well, I can only tell you the truth — that when I found cause to fear this desk had been surreptitiously opened, my

doubts turned to Neal. You see, we have no one about us but him and Dorcas; and Dorcas I am certain is trustworthy. But I admit that it was in consequence of what you told me that I cast any doubt on Neal. However it may have been, I deemed it well to secure the desk afterwards."

She had been opening the desk as she spoke, and she took from it a sealed packet and handed it to Captain Davenal. He opened it at once; glanced over its contents, two or three papers, one by one, and slightly drew in his lips.

"What a shame!" he burst forth.

She did not like to ask questions. She only looked at him.

"That they should have *bled* my father in this manner. Scoundrels! I was away, therefore the game was in their own hands. Did you read these papers, Sara?"

"I was obliged to read them; to see that they tallied with copies that papa had left. He left written instructions that I should do so."

"To whom was this money paid?"

"To Mr. Alfred King. Don't you see the receipts?"

"I'd walk ten miles before breakfast any morning to see the fellow hung. It's what he'll come to."

"He told me that he and you had once been friends," she said in a half whisper.

"And so we were. I believed in the fellow; I had no suspicion that he was a villain, and I let him draw me into things from which I could not extricate myself. I was a fool: and I had to pay for it."

In Sara's inmost heart there arose unbidden a rebellious thought: that others had had to pay for it; not Captain Davenal.

"Did it affect my father's health, this business?" he inquired, in a low tone.

"I fear it did," she replied, feeling that she could not avoid the confession. "I am sure it affected him mentally. There was a great change in him from that night."

Captain Davenal folded the papers slowly, and pushed them into his waistcoat pocket in his usual careless fashion. "What a fool I was!" he muttered; "and what a rogue was that other!"

"Are they safe there, Edward?"

"Safe enough until I get home. They will be burnt then, except this final receipt. Oh, if my father had but lived! I could at least have repaid him his pecuniary loss. It took all he left behind him, I suppose, to satisfy it?"

"Yes; all."

"He told me he feared it would, or nearly all, in the letter he wrote me when he was dying. Did things realise well?"

"No, very badly. There was not enough to satisfy the claim by two hundred pounds. Finally, Aunt Bettina advanced that."

"Does she know of this?" he exclaimed, in a startled tone.

"No, I kept it from her. It was difficult to do, but I contrived it."

"You were a brave girl, my sister! I don't know who would have acted as you have! All this trouble upon you, and never to worry me with it in your letters! — never to ask me for money to help in the need!"

"I thought you had none to give," she simply said.

"True enough: I had none; but most sisters would have asked for it. I shall repay at once Aunt Bettina; I shall repay, more gradually, to you the half of what my father possessed before this trouble was brought by me upon him. What do you say? — my wife's money? Tush, child! Do you know the amount of the fortune we have come into? It will be

but a drop of water in the ocean of that amount. If I did not repay it to you, she would."

Sara looked up.

"My wife knows all. I told her every word."

"O Edward! Before your marriage!"

"Not before. I suppose I ought to have done so, but it would have taken a greater amount of moral courage than I possessed. I *couldn't* risk the losing her. I told her, partially, a short time after our marriage: the full particulars I did not give her until last night."

Last night! Sara was surprised.

"She fell in love with you yesterday, Sara, and I thought well to let her know what you really were — how true you had been to me."

Sara was silent. It was in her nature to be true; and, as she believed, it was in her nature to *be able* to suffer.

"There were times when I felt tempted to wish I had stayed at home and battled with it," resumed Captain Davenal, after a pause. "But in that case the scandal would probably have gone forth to the world. As it was, no living being knew of it, save you and my father."

"And Mr. Alfred King," she said. Another name also occurred to her, but she did not mention it — that of Oswald Cray.

"Alfred King? Sara, my dear, I don't care to enter into particulars with you, but he was with me in the mess; more morally guilty, though less legally so, than I was. *He* has never told it, I can answer for, for his own sake."

"He always spoke to me of being only a sort of agent in the affair," she said. "He intimated that the money was due to other parties."

"Was due from himself, then. But it is over and done with: let it drop. And now, Sara, you must allow me to

ask you a personal question: are you still engaged to Oswald Cray?"

The demand was so unexpected, the subject so painful, that Sara felt the life-blood leave her heart for her face. "I am not engaged to Oswald Cray," she said in a low tone. "I — I cannot say that I ever was engaged to him."

A pause. "But — surely there was some attachment?"

"A little: in the old days. It is very long ago now. How did you know of it?"

"Oswald Cray himself told me. It was the evening we went up to town together after Caroline's wedding. He knew I was going out immediately with the regiment, and he gave me a hint of how it was between you. Only a hint; nothing more. I suppose — I suppose," more slowly added Captain Davenal, "that this miserable business of mine broke it off. I conclude that when Oswald found at my father's death that you had no money, he declined the compact. It's the way of the world."

"Not so. No. I do not think money, or the want of it, would have any influence on Oswald Cray. In this case it certainly had not. We had parted before papa died."

"What then was the cause, Sara?"

Should she tell him? — that it was his conduct broke it off? Better not, perhaps; it could do no earthly good, and would be only adding pain to pain.

"It is a thing of the past now, Edward; let it remain so. The cause that parted us was one that could not be got over. We are friends still, though we do not often meet. More than that we can never be."

Captain Davenal was sorry to hear it. Thoughtless and imprudent as he was by nature himself, he could not but be aware of the value of Oswald Cray. Such a man would make the happiness — and guard it — of any woman.

"I think I had better mention one fact to you, Edward,"

she resumed, after some moments given to the matter in her own mind. "You have been assuming that no one was cognisant of that business of yours, except papa, myself, and Mr. Alfred King; but —"

"No other living soul was cognisant of it," interrupted Captain Davenal. "My father's promptitude stopped it."

"Oswald Cray knew of it."

"Impossible!" he said, recovering from a pause of surprise.

"He did indeed. I am not sure that he knew the exact particulars, but he knew a very great deal. I believe — I fancy — that he had gathered even a worse impression of it than the case actually warranted."

Captain Davenal was incredulous. "From whom did he learn it?"

"I cannot tell you. I have always feared that, as he knew it, it must have been known to others."

"I tell you, Sara, that beyond you and my father, and King, nobody in the world knew of it. You are under some mistake. Oswald Cray could not have known of it."

"Nay then, Edward, as it has come so far, I will tell you the truth. Oswald Cray did know of it, and it was that, and nothing else, that caused us to part. He — he thought, after that, that I was no fit wife for him," she added in a low tone of pain. "And in truth I was not."

A pause of distress. "Unfit as my sister?"

"Yes. I suppose he feared that the crime might at any time be disclosed to the world."

"But *how* could he have known it?" reiterated Captain Davenal, the one surprise overwhelming every other emotion in his mind. "King *I know* would not tell; for his own sake he dared not: and we may be very sure my father did not. He sacrificed himself to retain it a secret."

"That Oswald Cray knew of it, I can assure you," she repeated. "He must have known of it as soon — or almost as soon — as we did. From that night that you came down to Hallingham in secret, his behaviour changed; and a little later, when a sort of explanation took place between us, he spoke to me of what had come to his knowledge. I know no more."

"Well, it is beyond my comprehension," said Captain Davenal; "it passes belief. Good Heavens! if Oswald Cray knew it, where's my security that others do not? I must look into this."

He was about to go off in impulsive haste, probably to seek Oswald Cray, but Sara detained him. The uncertain doubt, the dread lying most heavy on her heart, was not spoken yet.

"Don't go, Edward. You will regard me as a bird of ill-omen, I fear, but I have something to say to you, on a subject as unpleasant as this, though of a totally different nature."

"No crime, I hope," he remarked in a joking tone, as he reseated himself. It was utterly impossible for Edward Davenal to remain sober and serious long.

"It would be a crime — if it were true."

"Well, say on, Sara: I am all attention. I have been guilty of a thousand and one acts of folly in my life; never but of one crime. And that I was drawn into."

Captain Davenal did right to bid her "say on," for she seemed to have no inclination to say anything; or else to be uncertain in what words to clothe it. It was a decidedly unpleasant topic, and her colour went and came.

"I would not mention it, Edward, if I were not obliged; if I did not fear consequences for you now you have come home," she began. "It has been weighing me down a long, long while, and I have had to bear it, saying nothing —"

"Has some private debt turned up against me?" he cried hastily. "I thought I had not one out in the European world. I'll settle it to-morrow, Sara, whatever it may be."

"It is not debt at all. It is ——"

Sara stopped, partly with emotion, partly from her excessive reluctance to approach the topic. Should it prove to be altogether some mistake, a feeling of shame would rest upon her for having whispered it.

"It's what? Why don't you go on?"

"I must go on if I am to tell you," she resumed, rallying her courage. "Did you ever, before you went out — *marry* anybody?"

"Did I — what?" he returned, looking up with an exceedingly amused expression on his face.

"O Edward, you heard."

"If I heard I did not understand. What do you mean? Why do you ask me so foolish a question?"

"You have not answered it," she continued in a low voice.

Captain Davenal noted for the first time the changing hue of her face, the troubled eye, the shrinking, timid manner. His mood changed to seriousness.

"Sara, what *do* you mean? Did I marry anybody before I went out, you ask? I neither married anybody, nor promised marriage. I — Halloa! you don't mean that I am about to have a breach of promise brought against me?"

The notion was so amusing to Captain Davenal that he burst into a laugh. Sara shook her head; and when his laugh had subsided, she bent her cheek upon her hand, and related to him, calmly and quietly, what had occurred. The Captain was excessively amused: he could not be brought to regard the tale in any other light than as a joke.

"What do you say the lady's name was? Catherine what?"

"Catherine Wentworth."

"Catherine Wentworth?" he deliberated. "I never heard the name before in my life; never knew any one bearing it. Why, Sara, you do not mean to say this has seriously troubled you?"

It has very seriously troubled me. At times, what with one dread and another, I seemed to have more upon me than I could bear. I had no one to whom I could tell the trouble and the doubt: I dared not write it to you, lest your wife should get hold of the letter."

"And if she had? What then?"

"If she had?" repeated Sara. "Do you forget the charge?"

"It's too laughable for me to forget it. Rose would have laughed at it with me. Sara, my dear, rely upon it this has arisen from some queer mistake."

His open countenance, the utter absence of all symptom of fear, the cool manner in which he treated it, caused Sara to breathe a sigh of relief. Half her doubts had vanished.

"The strange thing is, why she should make the charge—why she should say she was your wife. It was not done to extort money, for she has never asked for a farthing. She said papa knew of the marriage."

"Did she?" was the retort, delivered lightly. "Did she tell all this to you?"

"Not to me. I have never spoken to her; I told you so. What I have learnt, I learnt through Neal."

Captain Davenal paused in reflection. "Who knows but that gentleman may be at the bottom of it?" he said at length. "If he opens desks—I don't say he does, I say *if* he does—he might get up this tale."

"And his motive?" returned Sara, not agreeing with the proposition.

"Nay, I don't know."

"But Neal did not come forward with the tale. It was in consequence of what I accidentally heard her say, that I questioned Neal; and I must do him the justice to declare that it was with very great reluctance he would answer me. I heard Neal tell her, apparently in answer to a question, that there was no doubt Captain Davenal was married; that he had married a Miss Reid, an heiress. She replied that she would have satisfaction, no matter what punishment it brought him (you) to."

"And Neal afterwards assured you that she was Captain Davenal's wife?"

"Neal assured me that *she said* she was. Neal himself said he did not believe her to be so; he thought there must be some mistake. She declared she had been married to you nearly a twelvemonth before you quitted Europe, and that Dr. Davenal knew of it."

"The story-telling little hussy!"

"Edward, I confess to you that I never so much as thought of its not being true in that first moment! I think fear must have taken possession of me and overpowered my judgment."

"You should have written to me, Sara."

"I have told you why I did not: lest the letter should fall into the hands of your wife. And I believe that a dread of its truth made me shrink from approaching it. That very same day I saw the young person come out of the War Office. I did not know, and don't know, whether it is the proper place to lodge complaints against officers, but I supposed she had been to lodge one against you."

"And you have seen her here since, at the house?"

"Occasionally. She has never been troublesome. She has come, apparently, to say a word or two to Neal. I have never questioned him upon the visits: I have dreaded the subject too much. Only yesterday I saw Neal speaking with her at the corner of the street."

"Well, Sara, I shall sift this."

She lifted her head. "Yes?"

"I shall. It would *not* have been pleasant had the rumour reached the ears of my wife."

He walked to the window and stood there a moment or two, a flush upon his face, a frown upon his brow. When he turned round again he was laughing.

"Did Aunt Bett hear of this?"

"O no."

"*She'd* have taken it for granted it was true. Had anybody told her in the old days that I had married sixteen wives, and then set the town on fire with a lighted torch, Aunt Bett would have believed it of me. But, Sara, I am surprised at you."

She glanced at him with a faint smile: not liking to say that the dreadful business, the secret of that past night, which had, no doubt, helped to send Dr. Davenal to his grave, had, at the time, somewhat shaken her faith in her gallant brother. But for that terrible blow, she had never given a moment's credit to this.

CHAPTER XXVII.

The Serjeant-Major's Wife.

CAPTAIN DAVENAL had made light of the matter to his sister. Knowing how unfounded was the charge, the whole thing struck him as being so absurd, so improbable, that his mind could but receive it as a jest. Nevertheless, upon reflection,

he saw that it might prove a subject of serious annoyance: such charges, especially if maliciously made and well-planned, sometimes cost a world of trouble in their refutation.

He had said it was his intention to sift it. Sara suggested that he should do what she had shrunk from doing — question Neal. Captain Davenal hesitated. If there were any foundation for his suspicion that Mr. Neal might have had something to do with making the charge, it would not perhaps be policy to speak to that gentleman in the present stage of the affair. Better try by some other means to find out who the young woman was, and all about her. It is true that without the help of Neal, Captain Davenal did not see his way clear to accomplish this: to seek for an unknown young woman in London, one to whom he had no clue, was something equivalent to that traditional search, the hunting for a needle in a bottle of hay.

“I wonder if Dorcas could tell us anything about her?” he exclaimed, ringing the bell upon impulse, as he did most things. And when Dorcas appeared in answer to it, he plunged into a sea of questions that had only the effect of bewildering her.

“You must know her, Dorcas,” interposed Sara. “It is a young woman, rather nice-looking, who has come here occasionally to see Neal. She generally wears large shawls that trail on the ground. Captain Davenal has a reason for wishing to know who she is.”

“You must mean Mrs. Wentworth, Miss Sara.”

“Mrs. Wentworth! Is that her name?” repeated Sara, feeling a sort of relief that the servant had not said Mrs. Davenal.

“That’s her name, Miss. She is an officer’s wife, and is in some trouble about him. I believe Neal is her uncle.”

Sara looked up. "Neal told my aunt that the young person was not his niece."

"Well, I don't know," said Dorcas; "I think she is his niece: at any rate, I have heard her call him uncle. I heard her call him uncle no longer ago than last night, Miss Sara."

"Where was that?" interposed Captain Davenal.

"It was here, sir. She called to see Neal. I was passing down stairs at the time from Mrs. Cray's room, and it seemed to me that there was some dispute occurring between them. She asked Neal to tell her where Captain Davenal was staying, and Neal refused. He said she should not go troubling Captain Davenal."

A pause from all. Sara's face grew troubled again.

"What did she want with me?" asked the captain.

"I don't know, sir," replied Dorcas. "I only heard that much in passing. I was carrying Mrs. Cray's tea-tray down."

"Do you know where she lives, this Mrs. Wentworth?"

"Not at all, sir. I have never known that."

"Edward, she is evidently looking out for you!" exclaimed Sara, as Dorcas retired.

"I hope and trust she is, and that she'll speedily find me," was the retort of Captain Davenal. "Nothing should I like better than to find her. I have a great mind to ask Neal openly what it all is, and insist upon an answer."

There was no opportunity for further conversation then. Mark Cray came in. Captain Davenal did not think him improved in any way. There was less of openness in his manner than formerly, and he rather appeared to evade Captain Davenal, quitting his presence as soon as he conveniently could. The next to enter was Miss Bettina. It was the first time she had met her nephew, and she was disposed to be cordial. Miss Bettina had gone forth that morning to visit his young wife,

entertaining a secret prejudice against her, and she returned home liking her. The little baby had been named Richard, too, and that gratified her.

A short while later, and Captain Davenal and his sister stood in the presence of this very young woman, Catherine Wentworth. In a room in Lady Reid's house, when they reached it — for Sara walked home with him — she was waiting. She had gone there inquiring for Captain Davenal, and upon being told Captain Davenal was out, she asked to be allowed to wait for him.

The sequel of this episode is so very matter-of-fact, so devoid of romance, that some of you, my readers, may think it might have been as well never to have introduced it. But, in that case, what would have become of the closing history of Neal? It was quite necessary, if that gentleman was to have a faithful biographer.

Sara Davenal sat, the white strings of her bonnet untied, wiping the drops of moisture from her relieved brow. So intense was the relief, that when the first few moments of thankfulness were past, she looked back with a feeling of anger that her mind's peace, for long long months, should have been disturbed so unnecessarily.

They were talking fast, this young woman and Captain Davenal. She *had* gone to Miss Davenal's house over and over again to inquire after him; she had handed Neal more than one letter to forward to him in India; she had been at the house the previous night, demanding to know where the captain was staying, and saying that she *would* see him; and she had this morning found out his address at Lady Reid's, and had waited until he came in.

But all for a very innocent and legitimate purpose. Mrs. Wentworth — and she was Mrs. Wentworth — had never seen Captain Davenal in her life before; had never pretended that

she had; she was only seeking him now to get from him some information of her real husband, Sergeant-Major Wentworth, of Captain Davenal's regiment.

One train of thought leads to another. Captain Davenal remembered now to have heard that the sergeant-major, a very respectable man, had voluntarily separated himself from his wife, and left her behind him in England when their regiment sailed for India, in consequence of some misconduct on her part. He stood there face to face with the young woman, trying to reconcile this plain statement of facts with the account of past assertions related to him by Sara.

"You are Sergeant-Major Wentworth's wife, you say," observed Captain Davenal, regarding her narrowly, watching every word that fell from her lips. If there had been any conspiracy between her and Neal to undermine his sister's peace, he felt that he should like to punish both of them. Sara had had enough of real troubles to bear, without having false ones brought upon her.

"Yes, I am," she replied. She had a wonderfully pretty face, now that it could be seen without her veil, and her manners were pleasing — nay, lady-like. But still there was the look of general untidiness about her that Sara had noticed before, though she did not wear a shawl to-day, but a black cloth mantle, cut in the mode.

"May I ask if you ever allowed it to be understood that you were anybody else's wife?" rejoined Captain Davenal, putting the question in the most convenient form he could, and in a half-jesting tone.

"Anybody else's wife?" she repeated, as if not understanding.

"Ay; mine, for instance?"

"Why, of course I never did. I don't know what you mean, sir."

"Does Neal know you are Sergeant-Major Wentworth's wife?"

"O dear, yes. I have done nothing a long while but beseech of him to write to you, sir, and ask if you would speak in my behalf to Wentworth, and make him allow me more, or else let me go out to him in India."

Sara interposed. It might not be wise in her, but she could not help herself, "I once accidentally heard a conversation of yours with Neal. You were speaking of this gentleman, Captain Davenal; it was the very day that we had heard news of his marriage with Miss Reid. I remember you said something to the effect that you would have satisfaction, cost what punishment it would to him. Did you allude to your husband?"

"Yes, I did," the girl replied. "And I hope he will be punished yet. I remember the time, too. I had had a letter that morning from one of the women who went with the regiment, a soldier's wife; she spoke of my husband in it in a way that vexed me; and she said, amidst other news, that their Captain — Captain Davenal — had just got married. The letter put me up to think that perhaps Captain Davenal could do some good for me with my husband, and I came off at once to Neal and asked him. Neal said he should not trouble Captain Davenal with anything of the sort; and the answer made me angry, and I reminded Mr. Neal that I could say one or two things about him that might not be pleasant, if I chose to be ill-natured; and at last he promised to send a letter for me to Captain Davenal, enclosed in one from himself, if I liked to write and state the case. I remember quite well saying that I would have satisfaction somehow, no matter what the punishment to Wentworth. Did my letters ever reach you, sir? I wrote two or three."

"Never."

"Like enough Neal never sent them," she exclaimed with an angry toss. "He said he did; and I have been always asking him whether he received no answer for me."

"Is Neal your uncle, Mrs. Wentworth?"

"I call him so sometimes, sir, when I want to be pleasant with him, but in point of fact he is no real relation. My step-mother is his sister; and that makes him a sort of uncle-in-law."

"And you have not — excuse my pressing the question, Mrs. Wentworth, but I have a reason for it — given Neal reason to suppose that you were ever married to any one except Sergeant-Major Wentworth?" resumed Captain Davenal.

"Never in my life, sir," she replied, and her accent of truth was unmistakable. "Say to Neal that I was married to anybody else! What for? It would be childish to say it; he knows quite well that I was married to Sergeant Wentworth. He was not sergeant-major then."

The falsehood then had been Neal's. Captain Davenal glanced at Sara. But the sergeant's wife spoke again.

"Could you interest yourself for me with Wentworth, sir?"

"Ah, I don't know. It is a ticklish thing, you see, to interfere between man and wife," added the captain, a jesting smile upon his lips. "What is your grievance against Wentworth?"

Mrs. Wentworth entered on her grievances; a whole catalogue. She required that her husband should send for her to be with him in India, or else that he should make her a better allowance, so that she could live "as a lady." She knew he got plenty of prize money she said, for she had been told so; and she finished up with stating that she had been to the War

Office, and to half a dozen other offices, to complain of him, and could get no redress.

"Well," said Captain Davenal, "I'll tell you what I'll do. I will write to your husband — a man for whom I have great respect — and inquire his version of the quarrel between you. We should always hear both sides of a question you know, Mrs. Wentworth. When I get his answer, you shall hear from me. To be candid with you, I must say that I don't think Wentworth is one to allow of much interference. He has good judgment, and he likes to exercise it. But I will write to him."

"And you'll promise to see me again, sir, in spite of Neal? What his objection was, I don't know, but he did all he could to prevent my seeing you."

"I don't think you need fear Neal's prevention for the future, in regard to seeing me," said Captain Davenal, in a significant tone, as he civilly bowed out Mrs. Wentworth.

"Well, Sara, and what do you think of Neal now?"

"I can't understand it; I can't understand why he should have said it, or what his motive was," slowly replied Sara. "Oh, if he only knew the cruel days and nights it caused me to pass. Shall you tell Aunt Bettina of Neal's falsity?"

"Tell her!" repeated Captain Davenal. "Do you think I can allow her and you to be any longer under the same roof with a villain such as Neal?"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Light.

NOT to Miss Bettina, however, did Captain Davenal at once take his way, but to Parliament Street. The revelation of Sara that morning — that the one dark episode in his own past history had been known to Oswald Cray — was troubling

Edward Davenal's mind far more than any sense of the inconvenience wrought by Mr. Neal.

They stood together in Oswald's sitting-room, the doors closed. A few words of greeting on both sides, and then the captain plunged wholesale, without any ceremony or preparation, into the object which had brought him.

"I have come to ask you a question," he began, dropping his voice to a confidential whisper. "How did you become acquainted with that miserable business of mine?"

"With what miserable business?" returned Oswald, in surprise.

"Don't you recal what I mean? That affair that swamped me. Or, I'm sure I may better say, swamped my father. The — the — those bills, you know."

Oswald did not know in the least. And said so.

"Hang it, Cray," exclaimed the captain, "why force a man to speak out? Those forged bills that I put into circulation, and couldn't get back again."

"I protest I do not know what you are talking of," returned Oswald. "I don't understand what it is you would ask me."

"I only ask how you became acquainted with the affair."

"I never was acquainted with the affair: with any affair such as you allude to," persisted Oswald. "I am not acquainted with it now."

"Do you mean to say that you did not become cognisant of that dreadful trouble I got into before leaving England? — The signing of those bills?"

"I never heard of it in my life. I never heard, or knew, that you were in any trouble whatever."

Captain Davenal sat staring at Oswald. How reconcile this denial with Sara's positive assurance of an hour ago?

"You are telling me truth?" he cried, with a perplexed air.

"Entire truth," said Oswald. "Why should I not?"

"What then could Sara mean?" debated Captain Davenal aloud. "She tells me that you did know of it."

"Sara tells you so?"

"She does. She says that — I don't see that I need scruple to speak," broke off Captain Davenal, "it's all over and done with, I suppose, — Sara says it was your knowledge of the affair that caused the breaking off of the engagement between yourself and her."

Oswald Cray was silent. A doubt crossed him of whether the gallant captain could have received some sabre-cut or sun-stroke in India, which had affected his brain. Captain Davenal noted his puzzled look, and strove to be more explanatory.

"When you and I were returning to town from Hallingham the night of Caroline's wedding, you hinted that there existed an attachment or engagement between you and Sara. For the first time I spoke of this to Sara this morning. She admitted that something of the kind had existed, but said it was over; and I saw that the subject was painful—one she wished to avoid. So I dropped it. Afterwards, in speaking of this worse business of mine, I observed that it had been known to three people only: my father, Alfred King, and Sara; but Sara interrupted me, saying that it was known to Oswald Cray. I disputed the fact; I said it *could not* have been known to you, but she persisted in her assertion, and finally confessed that it was in consequence of its coming to your knowledge that you broke off the engagement to her, deeming she was not worthy, as my sister, to become your wife. Pardon me yet a moment while I state that I am not here to question the decision; I don't wish to enter upon it at all, except to say that many would have done as you did, after what *I*, her brother, had been guilty of. All *that* is apart from the

business, and I am only telling you how it came out. Sara assures me that it was the sole cause of breaking off the engagement, and that you must have known of it almost as soon as — as my father knew. Now, I want you to tell me, Mr. Oswald Cray, how and whence that affair came to your knowledge. Have I made myself clear?"

"Perfectly clear, so far as explanation goes; but it is nothing but obscurity to me, for all that. In the first place allow me to repeat to you that I never knew before now that you were in any trouble whatever. This is my first intimation of it."

"And was it not that knowledge that caused you and Sara to part?"

"It was not. How could it have been, when I assure you I did not possess the knowledge? A — a great trouble, of which I would prefer not to speak, did lead to the parting, but it was entirely unconnected with you."

"Well, this is Greek," returned Captain Davenal. "There was no other trouble connected with the family, except mine. I suppose you mean that it was connected with them?"

"Yes."

"With which of them? There was no scapegoat in it except me."

"It was connected with Dr. Davenal," said Oswald reluctantly. "I cannot say more."

"With my father? Nonsense, if you mean anything wrong. A more upright man never breathed. Fancy him sending forth bad bills!"

"I could not fancy him doing so," replied Oswald. "The matter had nothing to do with money."

"I'll lay all I am worth it had to do with me, with my business," impulsively spoke Captain Davenal. "I will tell you how it was ——"

"Nay, it is not worth while," was Oswald Cray's interruption, as he thought how very different a thing was Lady Oswald's unhappy death from the topics under discussion. "Believe me, you had not and could not have had, anything to do with the real question."

"But I'll tell you, now I have begun. I and my choice friend, as I thought him then," — Captain Davenal spoke with scornful bitterness, — "got into an awful mess together, and could not get out of it. No matter whether it was gambling or horse-racing, or what not; money we were compelled to have. King assured me on his honour that in three weeks' time he should be in the possession of several thousand pounds, if we could only stave off exposure until then, and in an evil hour I yielded to his persuasion, and wrote my father's name. The suggestion was King's, the persuasion was King's, the full assurance that all would be well was King's. I don't say this in extenuation of myself; the guilt and madness of yielding were all mine. Well, the days went on, and when the time came, and the thing was on the point of exploding, King had not got the thousands he had counted on: moreover, I found that his expectation of getting them had been from the first very vague indeed, and we had a desperate quarrel. The sneak turned round; threatened me with exposure, with ruin, and I had to go down and confess the truth to my father. He saved me — saved me at the sacrifice of all he had, and, I fear, of his life."

There was a pause. Oswald had grown strangely interested. Captain Davenal continued.

"I shall never forget the effect it had upon him, never, never. I speak only of the hour of the communication; I never saw him after that. I told him there might be trouble with these bills, to get them at all; that even with the money in hand to redeem them, I was not sure the consequences

could be averted from me. I saw the change pass over his face; the grey, scared look; and it did not quit it again."

"Where did you see him?"

"At Hallingham. I went down at some peril, after leave had been refused me at head-quarters, getting to Hallingham about eleven o'clock on a Sunday night. I stayed an hour or so with my father in his study, and then went back to the station again, for I had to be at my post on duty the following morning. No one at home knew of my visit. I tapped at my father's study window and he let me in. Before I left, I asked to see Sara. I knew quite well, though they did not, that I should not go down again, and I did not care to leave for years without saying a word to her, so my father fetched her down from her room. We did not tell her the particulars, only that I had been doing something wrong, was in danger, and that my visit to Hallingham must be kept quiet. My poor father! I remember his asking in a burst of feeling what he had done that all this trouble should fall upon him. Another great trouble had befallen him that night in the death of Lady Oswald."

"Yes?" said Oswald with a calm manner but a beating heart. His thoughts were in that long past night, and Neal's description of it.

"It was very dreadful," resumed Captain Davenal, alluding to the matter of Lady Oswald. "My father was sadly cut up. Mark Cray had killed her, through administering the chloroform."

Oswald felt his heart stand still, his face flush with a burning heat. He moved nearer to Captain Davenal: but his voice was quiet still.

"Did you say *Mark* administered the chloroform?"

"It was Mark. Yes. My father said he had especially forbidden Mark Cray to give her chloroform. Mark in the

course of the day had proposed doing it, but the doctor warned him that chloroform would not do for Lady Oswald. When all was ready, he (my father) had to carry Lady Oswald's maid from the chamber in a fainting-fit, and when he got back to it he found Mark had administered the chloroform, which he had taken with him to the house surreptitiously, and was commencing the operation. The doctor said he could not make out Mark Cray that night. He was beginning the operation in so unskilful, so unsurgeon-like a manner, that my father had to push him away as he would have pushed a child, and perform it himself. But they could not recover Lady Oswald."

Oswald made no remark. He felt as one stunned.

"It struck me as being a most shocking thing," continued Captain Davenal. "I remarked to my father that it seemed like murder, and he said yes, he supposed the world would call it such."

"But why did not Dr. Davenal declare the truth — that it was Mark who had given the chloroform?" interrupted Oswald. "Why suffer himself to rest under the imputation?"

"What imputation? There was no imputation to lie under. All the world supposed the chloroform had been rightly and properly administered, according to the best judgment of both of them."

True; true. Oswald Cray had been speaking in accordance with his own private knowledge, not with publicly-known facts.

"My father kept the secret for Mark Cray's sake. If it went forth to the world, he said it would blight Mark's professional career for life. He told me the facts, but he intended to keep them from all others, and he warned me not to divulge them. I never did. I am not sure that I should feel justified

in telling even you now, but that Mark is no longer in his profession. My poor father made the remark that they were two heavy secrets for his breast to keep, mine and Mark Cray's."

The murmur of the words fell upon Oswald's ear, but he was as one who heard them not. A weighty amount of self-reproach was rising up within him. Captain Davenal talked on, and then hastened away, for he had Mr. Neal to settle with yet, leaving Oswald alone.

The scales, so long obscuring Oswald Cray's eyes, had fallen from them, and he saw the past in its true colours. The one wondering question that seemed to press upon him now was, how he could ever have doubted Dr. Davenal. Above his own self-reproach; above the bitter feeling of repentance for the wrong he had dealt out to her whom he best loved on earth; above his regrets for the late years wasted in a miserable illusion; was his remorse for having so misjudged that good man, misjudged him even to his grave. He saw it all now: how, when he questioned Dr. Davenal about his motives for administering the fatal medicine, he had taken the odium upon himself for Mark's sake: not even to him, his brother, would he, in his loving kindness, betray Mark.

Never had the pride, the self-esteem, of Oswald Cray received a blow like unto this. He had plumed himself on his superiority; he had cast off Dr. Davenal as one unworthy of him; he had dared, in his self-sufficiency, to cast off Sara. Her father was a man of suspicion, and therefore she was no fit mate for him! Whereas, Oswald now learnt that it was his own brother who was the offender: Dr. Davenal and his daughter were the victims. The full value, the Christian conduct, of that good man was patent to him now; the patient endurance of Sara became clear to him.

He lifted his hat and wiped the moisture from his brow, as he walked through the streets, all these considerations doing battle in his brain. The winter's day was cold, but Oswald's brow was hot; hot with inward fever. He was on his way to Miss Davenal's, to seek a conference with his half-brother: there were one or two questions he would put to him. He had taken his hat, and come out the moment Captain Davenal left him: business and all else gave way before this.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Bargain Sealed.

MARK CRAY sat in his wife's sick-room. Mark Cray found it (between ourselves) rather tiresome to sit in his wife's sick-room: and Mark was very apt to doze asleep at his post. Mark was asleep now. He was dreaming a charming dream of greatness — in which some grand scheme of Barker's had succeeded, and he and that gentleman were sailing about the atmosphere in a triumphal car of gold, looking down with complacency on the poor toiling mortals in the world below — when Dorcas came in with a whisper, and aroused him. Mr. Oswald Cray was in the dining-parlour waiting to see him, she said: and Mark, after a stare at the girl, descended, pushing back his clustering hair, which had disarranged itself in his sleep.

Oswald was standing near the fire. He turned to Mark and spoke in a quiet tone.

"I have a question to ask you, Mark. It relates to the past. Who—"

"Oh, never mind the past," interrupted Mark, with a half testy, half careless sort of manner. "I'm sure there's enough worry in the present, without going back to that of the past.

I wish that horrid mine had been sunk a thousand fathoms deep, before I had had anything to do with it. I daresay I shall pay you back some time!"

"It is not about the mine I wish to speak to you, or of payment either," calmly rejoined Oswald. "But, Mark, I want the truth from you — the truth, mind — upon another subject. It was you, was it not, who gave the chloroform to Lady Oswald?"

Mark made no reply, either truthful or otherwise. The question was so exceedingly unlike any he had expected that he only stared.

"It was supposed, I know, at the time to have been administered by Dr. Davenal. But I have reason to believe that it was administered by yourself, during his temporary absence from the chamber, and against his sanction. Was it so, Mark?"

"I suppose you heard this from the doctor himself at the time?" was Mark Cray's remark. "I remember you were worriting over it."

"I beg you to answer my question, Mark. What you say shall go no further."

"Well, yes, it was so," said Mark; "though I'm sure I can't think why you want to bring up the thing now. I did give her the chloroform, but I gave it for the best. As I was to perform the operation, I thought I had a right to exercise my own judgment, which was opposed to the doctor's. I was very sorry for the result, but I did it for the best."

"I wish you had told me the truth at the time, Mark. You suffered me to believe that the chloroform was given by Dr. Davenal."

"And what difference did it make to you which of us gave it?" was Mark Cray's reply, not an unnatural one. "You may guess that it was a thing I did not care to speak of. So

long as it was assumed we gave the chloroform conjointly, in accordance with ordinary practice and our best judgment, nobody could say a word; but if it had been disclosed that I gave it by myself, on my own responsibility, and against the doctor's opinion, I should have had the whole town carping at me."

Oswald had nothing further to say. He could not tell the bitter truth — that this miserable misapprehension had wrecked his hopes of happiness, had been making an icebolt of his heart in the intervening years.

Mark escaped, and returned to his wife's room, there to endeavour to drop into his golden dreams again, from which he seemed to have been aroused for no earthly use whatever. And Oswald stayed on in the hope of seeing Sara.

Not only in the dining-parlour of Miss Davenal's house was there a conference being held at that hour, but also in the drawing-room above: and but for the all-absorbing nature of his own thoughts, Oswald Cray had not failed to hear the sounds. Captain Davenal had got Neal there, before his aunt. And Mr. Neal was slipping out of all accusations as smoothly as an eel.

The group was noticeable. Miss Davenal in her chair, upright and angry, only partially understanding the cause of the commotion; Captain Davenal standing, open and impetuous, talking very fast; Neal full of repose and self-possession, all his wits in full play; and Sara sitting apart in silence, her cheek bent upon her hand. Captain Davenal charged Neal with treachery, general and particular. Neal had his plausible answer ready to meet it all.

The interview was drawing to an end, and little satisfaction had been derived from it. Poor Miss Davenal's ears were in a mazed condition: desks, letters, inventions to Sara touching a Mrs. Wentworth, and a hundred other charges, jumbling

hopelessly upon them, nothing being clear. Neal denied everything.

"You did tell Miss Sara Davenal that the young woman was my wife," cried Captain Davenal, indignantly.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Neal, respectfully. "I said I felt quite sure she was not; that there must be some mistake. Miss Sara perhaps will remember that such was my opinion."

"At any rate, you said the young woman made the charge," persisted Captain Davenal, irritated at the assured coolness.

"I did, sir. I understood the young woman to make it. She—"

"But she never did make it," interrupted Captain Davenal.

Neal shrugged his shoulders in submissive superciliousness, meant for Mrs. Wentworth. "It may suit the young woman's purpose to say so now, sir. I fear she is not very strict in her adherence to truth; but she certainly did make it at the time. However, sir, I am quite willing to take the blame upon myself, to allow that I misunderstood her."

"Why, you have not the face to tell me that you have gone on believing it?"

"O dear no, sir. I was very soon afterwards convinced that the thing was a mistake altogether."

"And pray why had you not the honesty to say so to Miss Sara Davenal?"

"I'm sure I should have been happy to say so, sir, had I possessed the least idea that it would have been welcome. But after the first blush, the matter appeared to be so very absurd, that I never supposed Miss Sara would give to it a second thought. If my silence has caused any uneasiness, I can only say how deeply I regret it."

"Who is the young woman?" helplessly cried Miss Bettina. "And pray Neal, how came it, if you had anything of the sort to say, that you did not say it to me? I am the proper person to hear these things; a young lady is not."

Neal advanced a step to his mistress and spoke in his low clear tone. "It was not my intention to speak to Miss Sara Davenal at all, ma'am, or to you either; I should not have thought of doing such a thing; but I could not help myself when Miss Sara questioned me upon the point."

All that was reasonable and feasible, and Miss Davenal nodded her head in approbation; but her nephew the captain got in a passion, and insisted that he should be discharged there and then.

Neal was quite ready to go, he said, civilly courteous, if his mistress saw fit to inflict upon him so severe a step. He was unconscious of having done anything to merit it. Perhaps she would be pleased to particularise his offence.

"He is a villain, aunt," broke forth the captain intemperately, before Miss Bettina could speak. I believe he has been one ever since my father took him into the house. He has opened letters, and unlocked desks, and altogether played the part of deceit. He *shall* go."

Neal interrupted, humbly begging the captain's pardon. He could most truthfully assure his mistress that he had done nothing of the sort; he had never opened a letter in the house, except his own; had never touched a desk, but to dust it. If Captain Davenal could mention any other distinct charge, he should be glad, as it would allow him an opportunity of refutation. No. His conscience acquitted him. He should quit the house, if he did have to quit it, with a clear character, and he thought his mistress would acknowledge that he deserved one. In the one little point concerning Mrs. Wentworth he might have been in error: first, in too readily giving ear to

what she said; next, in not having spoken to Miss Sara to set the doubt at rest in her mind. They were mistakes certainly, and he greatly regretted them.

"Neal," said the captain, too hot-headed to maintain his dignity, "I'd a hundred times rather be an open villain than a sneak. Why, you know you have been nothing but a spy from the very moment you entered the house. Aunt Bettina, listen! Before the regiment went away, I got into a little trouble, upon which I found it necessary to consult my father, and I went —"

"A little what?" asked Miss Bettina.

"Trouble. A little difficulty."

"Oh, ah, yes," said Miss Bettina. "You were always getting into it."

"Not such as that," thought the captain. "Well, I had to go down to Hallingham," he continued aloud, as he bent to her. "I did not care that any of you should know it, and I got down one night unexpected by my father. I was with him in his study for some time, and went back so as to be at duty the next morning. Would you believe," — pointing his finger at Neal — "that yon honest fellow was a spy upon the interview?"

Mr. Neal was a little taken by surprise, and Sara looked up astonished. But the man was not one to lose his impassibility.

"He was at the window, looking and listening: not, I believe, that he could see and hear very much. And he afterwards went abroad and told of the interview: told that his master had a secret visitor at night. You little thought, Mr. Neal, that the visitor was myself, or that I should ever bring it home to you."

Neal, all unconscious innocence, gazed straight forward into Captain Davenal's face. "I have not the least idea what

it is that you are speaking of, sir. My recollection does not serve me upon the point."

"O yes, it does," said Captain Davenal. "A subtle nature such as yours cannot forget so easily. Happily he, to whom you carried the tale of the evening, was a trustworthy man: he kept his own counsel, and told you Dr. Davenal's visitors were no business of his or of yours. I speak of Mr. Oswald Cray."

"Mr. Oswald Cray?" repeated Neal, plunging into reflection. "On my honour, sir, I have not the least idea what it is you mean. A visitor at night to my late master in his study? Stay, I do remember something of it. I — yes — I was outside, taking a mouthful of fresh air preparatory to retiring to rest, and I saw some one — a stranger I took him to be — come stealthily in at the gate, and he was afterwards shut in with my master. I'm sure, sir, I beg your pardon even at this distance of time, if I was mistaken. I feared he might be a suspicious character, and I think I did go to the window, anxious for my master's personal safety. I could not have supposed it was you, sir."

Was it possible to take Neal at a disadvantage? It did not seem so?

"And it was anxiety for your master's personal safety that caused you afterwards to recount this to Mr. Oswald Cray? Eh?"

"Does Mr. Oswald Cray say I recounted it to him, sir?" inquired Neal, probably not feeling sure of his ground just here.

"That's my business," said Captain Davenal, while Sara looked round at Neal. "You *did* recount it to him."

"All I can say, sir, is, that if I did, I must have had some good motive in it. I cannot charge my memory after this lapse of time. Were I in any anxiety touching my master,

Mr. Oswald Cray was probably the gentleman I should carry it to, seeing he was a friend of the family. I have — I think — some faint remembrance that I did speak to Mr. Oswald Cray of that mysterious visitor,” slowly added Neal, looking fixedly up in the air, as if he were trying to descry the sun through a fog. “It’s very likely that I did, sir, not being at ease myself upon the point.”

Captain Davenal was losing patience. It seemed impossible to bring anything home to Neal with any sort of satisfaction. At the close of the captain’s interview with Oswald Cray, the latter had mentioned — but not in any ill-feeling to Neal — that that functionary had spoken to him of the night interview at Dr. Davenal’s; had said he was outside the window at the time. Oswald had not said more; he deemed it well not to do so; but Captain Davenal had become at once convinced that it was but one of Neal’s prying tricks. He turned to Miss Davenal.

“Aunt Bettina, this is waste of time. In nearly the last interview I ever had with my father, he told me he had doubts of Neal. He feared the man was carrying on a game of deceit. I *know* he has been doing it all along. Will you discharge him?”

“I can’t understand it at all,” returned Miss Bettina.

“I’ll enlighten you one of these days, when you are not very deaf, and we can have a quiet half-hour together. Sara, what do you say?”

Sara rose from her seat, her cheek flushing, her voice firm. “Neal must leave, Aunt Bettina,” she said, bending down to the deaf ear. “Edward is quite right.”

Miss Bettina looked at them all in succession. Had she believed the accusations, she would have discharged Neal on the spot, but she doubted them. She had thought there was

not so faithful a servant in the world. And he looked so immaculate as he stood there!

"I don't go out of the house this night until he has left it, Aunt Bettina," resumed the captain.

"This night!" echoed Miss Bettina, catching the words. "I can't let Neal go without warning, leaving us without a servant. Who is to wait upon us?"

"You shall have my servant, aunt; one I have brought home with me —"

"No," said Miss Bettina, resolute in the cause of justice. "Neal, I will not part with you in that hasty manner. I cannot judge yet between you and Captain Davenal. That you must leave, is obvious; but you shall have the proper month's warning."

Neal stepped up, all suavity. "I beg your pardon, ma'am; you are very kind, but I could not think of remaining a day to cause unpleasantness in the family. I had better go at once. I have my feelings, ma'am, although I am but a dependant. My conscience tells me that I have served you faithfully."

"I think you have, Neal."

"I have indeed, ma'am, and I hope it will be remembered in my character."

"Don't send to me for one," impetuously broke out Captain Davenal. "And now, Neal, the sooner you are out of the house the better. I shall keep my word; to see you away from it ere I quit it myself."

Neal bowed; he could but be ever the respectful servant; and retired. Miss Davenal was bewildered. What with parting with Neal, what with being left with nobody to replace him, she could not gather her senses. Captain Davenal sat down. First of all promising her that the servant he spoke of should be in the house before night, to remain with her until

she was suited with one, he next began to enlarge upon Neal's delinquencies, and try to make her comprehend them.

Sara silently left the room. It was altogether a painful subject, and she did not care to hear more of it now. She went down into the dining-parlour, her movements slow and quiet; since Mrs. Cray's increased danger, noise had been avoided in the house as much as possible. Some one was standing up by the mantel-piece, his back towards her; in the dusk of the room — for evening was drawing on — Sara took it to be Mark; and yet she thought she had heard Mark's step in his wife's chamber now, as she came down stairs. This gentleman was taller, too! He turned suddenly round, and the fire threw its light on the face of Oswald Cray.

She stood a moment in surprise, and then went up to him, holding out her hand as to any ordinary visitor, and saying a word of apology that he should have been left there unannounced. A strange expression, an expression of deprecation, almost of humility, sat on his features, and he did not touch the offered hand.

"I waited to see you," he said. "I came here to see Mark, who has been with me."

He stopped suddenly. His manner, his looks were altogether strange. Sara thought something must have happened.

"What is the matter?" she asked. "You look as if you had some great care upon you."

"And so I have. That care that arises from shame and repentance; from finding that we have been upon the mistaken road of wrong; been treading it for years."

She sat down, quietly, timidly, looking to him for an elucidation, half frightened at his emotion.

"I wish to have an explanation with you, Sara. I want

— if it be possible — forgiveness. And I don't know how to enter upon the one, or to sue for the other."

She had rarely seen him otherwise than calmly self-possessed. Generally, especially of late years, he was cold almost to a fault. And now he was as one blazing with an inward fire: his lips were scarlet, his brow was flushed, his voice quite hoarse with emotion.

"In the years gone by, I—I—threw you up, Sara. While I loved you better than anything on earth, knowing that you were the only one upon it who could ever awaken the passion within me, did I live to centuries, I voluntarily resigned you. That night in the Abbey grave-yard at Hallingham, when we accidentally met — you have not forgotten it — I told you that I could not marry you; that you were not fit to be my wife — Hush! it was equivalent to it. Sara, how can I stand now before you and confess that I was altogether under an error; that in my pride, my blindness, I had taken up a false view of things, and was acting upon it? Can you see my shame, my repentance, as I say it to you?"

"I don't understand you," she gasped, utterly bewildered.

"Will you so far pardon me — will you so far trust me after all that has occurred — as to give me this one single word of explanation? To whom did you attribute the cause of my acting in the way I did? Whose ill-conduct was it, as you supposed, that had raised the barrier between us?"

She hesitated, not perhaps caring to reply.

"I have had an interview to-day with Captain Davenal," he resumed, in a low tone. "He has given me the details of the unhappy business he was drawn into — the forged bills: I am, so far, in his entire confidence. Will that help you to answer me?"

"It was that," she said.

"That alone?"

"That alone. There was nothing else."

"Well, Sara, can you believe me when I tell you that I never heard of that business until to-day? — That Captain Davenal had nothing whatever to do with my course of action?"

Indeed she looked as though she could not believe him. What else then? she asked. Who had? Under what impression had he acted?

"Ah, there lies my shame! Sara, I dared — I dared to attribute ill-conduct to another," he cried with emotion. "In my pride and folly, in my mind's delusion, I presumed to set myself up for a judge over one who in goodness might have crushed me to nothing. I shall *never* get over the remorse during life."

"You — did not — attribute ill-conduct of any sort to me?" she said with white lips.

"To *you*! To you whom I have ever believed to be one of the best and truest women upon earth! — whom I have regarded through it all with an amount of respect unutterable! No, no. But the question serves me right."

She laid her hands one over the other as she sat, striving to keep her feelings under control. Praise from him was all too sweet yet.

"O do me justice so far, Sara! While I gave you up, I knew that to my heart and judgment none were like unto you for goodness: I knew that if my obstinate pride, my spirit of self-sufficiency, did but allow me to marry you, you would be the greatest treasure man ever took to himself. Can you tolerate me while I dare openly to say these things? — can you believe that I am pouring them forth in my humiliation? I have loved you deeply and fervently; I shall love you always; but even that love has scarcely equalled my admiration and my respect."

"But who else, then, could have had any counteracting influence?" she returned, after a while.

"I dare not tell you."

"There was only Edward. I had no other brother. No one else could have done anything to bring shame upon — oh, surely you cannot mean papa!" she broke off, the improbable idea flashing over her.

"Don't ask me, Sara! In mercy to myself."

"Papa who was so good?" she reiterated, paying no heed to his words in her wonder. "He was so just, so kind, so honourable! I think if ever there was a good man on earth, who tried to do as God would have him, it was papa. It is impossible you could suspect anything wrong in him!"

"My object in waiting to see you this evening was, first, to make my confession; secondly, to ask you to be more just, more merciful than I have been, and to forgive me," he rejoined, in a low tone. "I must add another petition yet, Sara: that you would generously allow this one point to remain as it is between us."

"But I think you ought to tell me," she urged. "Did you indeed suspect papa?"

"Yes."

"But of what?"

"Ah, don't press me further, Sara, for I cannot tell you. A singular accident led me to doubt Dr. Davenal's conduct — honour — I hardly know what to call it — and there followed on this a chain of circumstances so apparently corroborative of the doubt, that I thought I had no resource but to believe. I believed, and I acted upon the belief: I judged him harshly; I treated him coldly; I gave up you, my dearest hope and object in life; and this day only have my eyes been opened, and to my shame I learn that the whole thing, as

regarded him, was a delusion. *Will* you — will you generously let my confession rest here?"

"Papa would not have done as Edward did," she whispered.

"No, no, it was not anything of that nature. Money and money-matters had nothing to do with it. It was an entirely different thing. I am so ashamed of myself that I cannot bear to speak of this further. Surely I have said enough? It was a mistake, a misapprehension altogether: and the greatest act of kindness you can do me now is to let it rest here."

She sat gazing at him with questioning eyes, nearly lost in wonder.

"Yes, the impression under which I acted was a false one. There existed no cause whatever for my estranging myself from you. But for my own unpardonable credulity, I need never have given you up: and the past years of anguish — and I know they have been full of anguish to both of us — ought not to have had place. I was misled by an unfortunate chain of events: and nothing remains to me but shame and repentance."

There ensued a silence. Sara was standing on the hearth-rug now, and he took his elbow from the mantel-piece, where it had been resting, and moved a step towards her.

"Can I ever hope for your forgiveness?"

"It seems to me that I have nothing to forgive," she answered, in a low voice. "If circumstances misled you, you could not be blamed for acting upon them, according to your belief."

"Sara!" — he laid his hand upon her shoulder and his voice shook with the intensity of its emotion — "may I dare to hope that you will let me in my future life strive to atone for this?"

"How atone for it?" she faltered.

"Will you generously look over the past folly? — will you suffer it to be between us as it used to be — will you be my wife at last?"

She trembled as she stood, the conscious light of love mantling in her cheek and in her drooping eye. Mr. Oswald Cray held her before him, waiting and watching for the answer, his lips parted with suspense.

"My brother's crime remains still," she whispered. "A memento of the past."

"Your brother's crime! Should you be punished for that? — for him? And what of *my* brother?" he continued, the revelation of the day imparting to his tone a whole world of remorse, of self-condemning repentance. "What disgrace has not my brother brought to me? O Sara; should the ill wrought by these ties part us? It never ought to have done so. Let us stand alone, henceforth, you and I, independent of the world! Don't try me too greatly! don't punish me, as in justice you might!"

For a moment her eyes looked straight into his with a loving, earnest glance, and then dropped again. "I will be your wife, Oswald," she simply said. "I have never tried to forget you, for I knew I could not."

And as if relief from the tension of suspense were too great for entire silence, a faint sound of emotion broke from Oswald Cray. And he bent to take from her lips that kiss, left upon them so long ago in the garden-parlour of the old house at Hallingham.

CHAPTER XXX.

"Finance," this Time.

AN afternoon in March. The sun was drawing towards its setting amidst gorgeous clouds, and the red light, illumining the western sky, threw its rays into an invalid's chamber, and lighted it up with a warm hue.

Something else was drawing towards its setting. And that was the feeble life of the chamber's chief occupant. It was a good-sized pleasant room: the bed at the end farthest from the window; the middle space devoted to the comfort of the invalid, a table with some books upon its handsome cover, a sofa, easy chairs, velvet footstools, and a few pretty ornaments to amuse the eye.

On the sofa, by the side of the fire, a coverlid of the lightest and softest texture thrown gently over her, lay the invalid, her hands white and attenuated, her face drawn and wan. But there was a strange beauty in the face yet; in the eyes with their violet depths, in the exquisite features shaded by the mass of silky hair. You do not fail to recognise Mrs. Cray. Just now the eyes were closed, and she was dozing peacefully.

At the opposite end of the hearth-rug, sitting restlessly in an easy chair, was Mark. Of late Mark had been rather prone to be as still and idle as his wife: the inert life wearied him, it chafed his spirit; but there was no escape from it at present, and Mark Cray had perforce resigned himself to it, as an imprisoned bird resigns itself in time to its cage. Mark's future prospects were uncommonly vague: in fact they were as yet bounded by the old expectation-anchor, the "something" that was to "turn up." Any time in the past few weeks, his wife's death might have been expected, and Mark had yielded

to the idleness of the circumstances, and been tranquil. Mr. Barker was away in Paris, and did not write; the Wheal Bang affairs were going on to a comfortable conclusion, and Mark was letting the future take care of itself. Strolling out for short walks; giving a quarter of an hour to the "Times"; wandering for a few minutes into the sitting-rooms and the presence of Miss Bettina, and lounging back in the easy chairs by the side of his wife — thus had Mark's recent days been passed.

But on this afternoon all was changed, and Mark's forced quiescence had given place to a fidgety restlessness, very characteristic of the old times. The post had just brought a letter from Mr. Barker — some accident or contrary weather having delayed the arrival of the French mail — and Mark Cray, upon reading it, felt exalted into the seventh heaven.

Barker had succeeded! He had brought out a company in Paris, connected with finance; the great work he had been striving for so long. In three weeks' time from that date it would all be in full operation, and if Mrs. Cray were sufficiently well to be left, and Mark came over to Paris, he could instantly step into a post in the Company at a salary of eight hundred a year to begin with. In about six months' time, according to moderate computation, the thing would be in full swing, and the profits inaugurated certainly at not less than six thousand per annum. The half of which splendid income should be Mark's. Such was Mr. Barker's news.

Can you wonder at Mark's restlessness? At his brightened eye, his flushed face, as he sits there in the chair, bolt upright, his hand raised incessantly to push back his hair? He glances across at Caroline — whom he really loves very much still — and thinks what a pity it is that all this good fortune should have delayed itself until now. Had it come too late for her? Mark Cray in his sanguine fashion actually

asks himself the question, medical man though he is. For the last two or three days Caroline had seemed so much better! only on this very morning she had told Mark she felt as if she were getting well again.

Mark moved his restless legs and contrived to knock down the fire-shovel. The noise awoke Caroline. She stirred, and turned her opening eyes on her husband.

"What was that? Did anybody come in, Mark?"

"I threw over one of the fire-irons. I am sorry it disturbed you. They are always sticking out, tiresome things! It's not a proper fender for a bed-room. Caroline, I have had a letter from Barker," he continued, rising in excitement and standing before her on the hearth-rug. "It's the most glorious news! The thing's realised at last."

"What thing?" asked Caroline, feebly, after a pause of bewilderment.

"The thing he has had on hand so long, the great scheme he has been working for. O Carine, I wish you could get better! There's eight hundred a year waiting for me in Paris; and there'll be an income of at least three thousand before six months are over. Three thousand for my share, you know. I'm sure you would like living in Paris."

She did not answer. Nothing was heard save the quick gasps of the panting breath, the result of excessive weakness, or — of — something else coming very near. Mark was struck with some change in her aspect, and bent down to her.

"Don't you feel so well, Carine?"

"I — feel — weary," was all she answered, her voice ominously low.

"Where's Sara, I wonder?" said Mark. "I'll go and send her to you. You want some beef-tea, or something, I daresay."

Mark went down the stairs, meeting Sara on them. In the drawing-room, with Miss Bettina, was Oswald Cray, who had just come in. He was a frequent visitor now.

The half-brothers shook hands, coldly enough. They were civil to each other always, but there could never be cordiality between them. Not because of the past; but because they were so essentially different in mind, in judgment, and in conduct.

"My luck has turned at last, Oswald," exclaimed Mark, impulsively.

"In what way?" asked Oswald, who was leaning over the back of a chair while he talked to Miss Bettina.

"I have just had a letter from Barker," answered Mark, running his hand through his hair with his restless fingers. "I told you what a great scheme he had got on hand in Paris, but you turned the cold shoulder on it. Well, it's bearing fruit at last."

"Oh," said Oswald, evincing a desire, if his tone and manner might be judged by, to turn the cold shoulder on it still, metaphorically speaking. "How is your wife this afternoon?" he continued, passing to a different subject.

"She has been so much better the last few days that one might almost be tempted to hope she'd get well again," rejoined Mark, volubly. "She seems tired now—low, I thought. Sara's just gone up to her. What a shame it is, that things turn out so cross-grained and contrary!"

The concluding sentence, delivered with marked acumen, reached the ear of Miss Bettina. She looked up from her knitting to scan Mark.

"If Barker's luck had only been realised six months ago, what a thing it would have been!" he went on. "Caroline might have got better, instead of worse. In the enjoyment of luxuries in a home of her own, renewed wealth and position in

prospective, with the pure air of the balmy French capital, there's no knowing what benefit she might not have derived. And now it comes too late! I shall ever regret it for her sake."

"Regret what?" sharply interposed Miss Bettina.

Mark replied by giving a summary of Barker's luck. Miss Bettina paused, knitting-needles in hand, her keen grey eyes fixed on Mark, as she tried to understand him.

"Barker in luck!" she repeated, catching some of the words and the general sense. "Has he come into an estate in the moon? Don't be a simpleton, Mark Cray."

Mark Cray felt exasperated. Nothing angered him so much as for people to pretend to see these enchanting prospects with different eyes from his own. He had always been convinced it was done only to vex him. Poor Mark! He turned to Oswald, and began expatiating upon the good fortune that was drawing so near; and Oswald saw that it was of no use to try to stop him. The fever-mania had again taken hold of Mark.

"What is the scheme, do you say?" asked Oswald, just as he would have asked anything of a child; and perhaps it was not altogether his fault that a sound of mockery was discernible in his tone.

"It's connected with finance."

"Oh!" said Oswald.

"It is the grandest thing that has been brought before the public for many a year," continued Mark, his voice impressive, his light eyes sparkling. "The very greatest —"

"Grander than the Great Wheal Bang?" inopportunistly interposed Miss Bettina, Mark's earnest tones having enabled her to hear better than usual.

"A hundred times grander," returned Mark, his mind too completely absorbed in the contemplation of the grandeur to

detect the irony. "That is, better, you know, Miss Bettina. The mine was very good; but of course there *was* a risk attending that, from water or other causes, and the result unfortunately realised it. This is different. Once the company is formed, and the shares are taken, it can't fail. Barker and I went through the thing together over and over again when he was in London: we had it all down before us in black and white: we allowed for every possible risk and contingency, and we proved *that the thing could not fail, if once organised.*"

Oswald listened quietly. Miss Bettina had lost the thread again.

"The job was to organise the thing," resumed Mark. "It could not be done without money, and Barker — to speak the truth — found a difficulty in getting that. The money market was tight here, and men don't care to speculate when money's not plentiful. He also required the co-operation of some French capitalist, who would put his name to it, some good man on the Bourse, and *that* was hard to get. Those Frenchmen are all so narrow-minded, fight so shy. He knows two or three good Englishmen in Paris who were willing to go into it, and who helped Barker immensely with advice and introductions, and that; but they had no funds at command. However, it's all accomplished now. Barker has fought his way through impediments, and surmounted them. The company's formed, the preliminary arrangements are successfully carried out, and fortune is at hand."

"What's at hand?" asked Miss Bettina.

"Fortune," repeated Mark. "I shall take one of those nice little boxes in the Champs Elysées. Some of them are charming. Or perhaps only part of one if — if Carine — O dear! it is hard for her that this luck did not fall in a year ago! I wonder," broke off Mark, passing to another phase of his

future visions, "I wonder whether, if it were possible to get Caroline over to Paris now, the change might benefit her?"

"You think of residing in Paris?" said Oswald.

"Of course I do. Paris will be the centre of operations. Barker wants me over there at once; and the minute I join him I begin to draw at the rate of eight hundred a year. Just to go on with, you know, until the money falls in."

"Mark," said Oswald, after a pause, "will it be of *any* use saying a word of warning to you?"

"On what subject?" returned Mark, looking up with surprise.

"On this subject. It seems to me that you are falling into another delusion: that the —"

"No, it will not be of any use," burst forth Mark in strange excitement. "I might have known beforehand that you'd turn out my enemy upon the point. If gold and diamonds were dropping down in a shower from the skies, you'd not stretch forth your hand to catch them. There's a mist before your eyes, Oswald, that prevents you seeing these things in their proper aspect."

He began to pace the room, as he spoke, chafing considerably. *Why* was it that these little hints of warning awoke the irritation of Mark's spirit? Could there be an under-current of doubt in his mind, whether Oswald was right and he wrong? However it might be, one thing was certain — that no warning, let it come from whom it would, could do any good with Mark.

As he turned to face them again, Sara entered. An expression of alarm was on her face, and she closed the door before speaking. She had come to say that Caroline appeared worse; altogether different from usual.

Mark ran up the stairs; Miss Bettina put down her knitting to follow. Sara turned to Oswald Cray.

"She knows you are here, Oswald, and would like to see you. She wants to bid you good-bye. I think her saying that alarmed me more than anything."

Caroline was on the sofa as before. Very quiet, save for her panting breath. Her white hands lay listless, her face, dreadfully worn though it was, was calm, tranquil. She looked at them one by one, and slightly raised her hand as Oswald entered. He bent down to her; taking it in his.

"Thank you for all," she whispered.

The change in her countenance struck them. It so far frightened Mark as to take from him his self-possession. He pushed Oswald away.

"O Carine, what is it? You cannot be going to die! You must not die, now that all this good luck is coming upon me!"

She glanced up at him, her eyes wide open, as if she scarcely understood.

"There's the most beautiful home getting ready for you in Paris, Carine," he resumed, his voice sounding as if he were on the verge of tears. "We'll live in the Champs Elysées; it is the loveliest spot, and you can't fail to grow better there, if we can only get your disease to turn. O Carine! don't leave me just when I am able to surround you with wealth and luxury again! This will be a greater and a surer thing than the Great Wheal Bang."

"Don't, Mark! I am going to a better home."

"But I can't let you go until I have atoned for the past! I ——"

"Hush, hush!" she interrupted. "O Mark! if you only knew how welcome it is to me! I am going to be at peace after all the turmoil. I am going to rest."

"Do you *want* to go?" pursued Mark, half resentfully.

"Don't you *care* to get well?"

"I have not cared to get well since I came to England.

That is, I have not thought I should," she returned between the gasps of her laboured breath. "When I heard the bell toll out for Prince Albert, I asked who was I that I should be spared when he was taken? The next world has seemed very near to me since then. As if the doors of it had been brought down to earth and stood always open."

That the death of the prince, brought so palpably, as may be said, before her, had taken a great hold on the mind of Mrs. Cray, there was no doubt. Several times during her later weeks of illness, she had alluded to it. Her principal feeling in relation to it appeared to be that of *gratitude*. Not gratitude for his death; there was only sorrow for that; but for the strange impression it had left upon her own mind, the vista of the Hereafter. For the good and great prince to be taken suddenly from the earthly duties so much needing him, was only an earnest, had one been wanting, that he had entered upon a better and higher sphere. It seemed that he had but been removed a step; a step on the road towards heaven; and it most certainly in a measure had the effect of reconciling her to her own removal, of tranquillising her weary heart, of bringing her thoughts and feelings into that state most fitting to prepare for it. Often and often had she awoke from a deep sleep, starting suddenly up and calling out, "I thought I heard St. Paul's bell again!"

"I wish the Great Wheal Bang had been in the sea!" gloomily exclaimed Mark Cray, who was no more calculated for a scene, such as this, than a child, and had little more control over his tongue. "But for that mine turning out as it did, your illness might never have come on."

"Don't regret it, Mark," she feebly said. "God's hand was in all. I look back and trace it. But for the trouble brought to me then, I might never have been reconciled to go."

It is so merciful! God has weaned me from the world before removing me from it."

Mark Cray drew a little back and stood gazing at his wife, a gloomy, helpless sort of expression on his countenance, as his right hand nervously pushed back his hair. Oswald was at the head of the sofa, Sara near to him, and Miss Bettina was at the far end of the room, looking after some comforting medicine drops. Thus there was a clear space before the sofa, and the red light from the fire played on Caroline's wasted features. That she was dying — dying suddenly, as may be said — there could be no doubt.

"If things had not turned out so crossly!" began Mark again. "I knew I should redeem the misfortunes of that Wheal Bang. I always told you I should extricate myself, Caroline."

"We shall all be extricated from our misfortunes here," came from her dying lips. "A few years more or less of toil, and strife, and daily care, and then redemption comes. Not the redemption that *we* work. O Mark, if you could see things as I now see them! When we are on the threshold of the next world, our eyes are opened to the poor value of this. Its worst cares have been but petty trials, its greatest heart-ache was not worth the pang. They were but hillocks that we had to pass in our journey upwards, and God was always leading us. If we could but trust to him! If we did but learn to resign our hands implicitly to his, and be led as little children!"

Mark Cray felt somewhat awed. He began to doubt whether it were exactly the time and place to pour forth regrets after the misfortunes of the Great Wheal Bang, or enlarge on the future glories opening to him in the French capital.

"It is so much better for me to be at rest! God is taking me to the place where change and sickness cannot enter. I

shall see Uncle Richard: I shall see poor Richard who went before him: I shall see papa and mamma, whom I have nearly forgotten. We all go, some sooner some later. This world lasts but a little minute; that one is the home, the gathering-place. Mark, dear Mark! the troubles here are of so little moment; they are only trifling hindrances through which we must bear on to Eternity. Oh, trust God! They are all sent by Him."

There occurred an interruption. Mr. Welch, who had not been able to call before, that day, came in, and the solemn feeling that had been stealing over those in the chamber gave place to the ordinary routine of every-day event.

"Before the morning," the surgeon said when he left, in answer to a grave question put to him by Miss Bettina.

CHAPTER XXXI.

Six Months Later.

THE first scenes of this story were laid in Hallingham, and it is only well that it should close there. Well or not, it cannot be helped; for the chief personages you have met in its course were now gathered in that town.

Caroline died in March, and this was the beginning of October; so you see several months have gone on in the year. The cold ungenial summer of 1862 had come to an end, and the Great Exhibition, characteristic of the year, was drawing to an end also. Ah! how we plan, and plot, and work, and a higher Hand mars it! A higher wisdom than ours looks on, and overrules, and changes all things! The one brave, earnest spirit, who had worked with all the energy of his true heart to bring about and perfect that exhibition, was alone not spared to see its fruition. Was there a single heart, of all

the multitudes that flocked to it, that was not weighed down with a latent sense of the something wanting, and of the exhibition's failure? — of its failure in a general point of view, and of our own short-seeing helplessness. The guilt had been taken off the gingerbread.

In the Abbey at Hallingham, settled in it, as she hoped, for life, was Miss Bettina. With the death of Mrs. Cray, all necessity for Miss Davenal's remaining in London had ceased. In point of fact, it may be said to have ceased from the time Mark Cray and his wife went into Normandie; but she had stayed on. Very much disliking London, Miss Davenal made arrangements for leaving it as soon as she could do so with convenience, and in June had come back to Hallingham. Some difficulty arose about a residence; Miss Davenal was not one who could be put anywhere. She possessed some houses of her own in the town, good ones, but they were let. Oswald Cray it was who directed her attention to the Abbey. It had never been occupied since Mark's short tenancy of it; and at last, after some few alterations had been made in it, to the increase of its in-door comfort, Miss Davenal took it on a lease and entered into possession.

So far as human foresight may anticipate in this world of changes, she had settled down for life. The great barn of a drawing-room had been made into two apartments — handsome both, and of good proportions; the one was the drawing-room still, the other was Miss Davenal's bed-chamber. A quiet, tranquil life she might expect to live here with her two handmaidens, Watton and Dorcas.

For Watton had settled down also after her roving, and come back to Hallingham. Watton had not lightly or capriciously resigned her superior situation in London; but ever since the past winter, Watton had been ailing. She tried three or four doctors; she took, as she said, quarts of physic;

but Watton could not get strong. There was no particular disorder, and she came at length to the conclusion that it must be London that disagreed with her; and she gave notice to quit her place. So she was installed once more upper maid to Miss Davenal, and seemed since the change to have got well all one way.

She would have more to do than she had in the old days at the doctor's, for there was no Neal now. Miss Davenal declined to try another man-servant, probably from a conviction that she should never replace the services of that finished and invaluable domestic. Miss Davenal was by no means convinced of the treachery attributed to him by Captain Davenal, and at odd moments was apt to look upon the charge as emanating solely from the gallant captain's fanciful imagination.

Neal himself was flourishing. Considering the precaution he took to keep himself right with the world, there was not much probability that he would ever be otherwise. Neal had entered on a situation with one of her Majesty's ministers; his lordship's own personal attendant. It was to be hoped there'd be no opportunity afforded him of getting at any of the state secrets! Ah, how many of these rogues are there, besides Neal, filling confidential posts in the world! Will it be so to the end of their career? Will it be so with Neal? I sometimes wonder.

The Abbey was gay just now, in this same month of October, for Miss Davenal was entertaining a party in it. Sara had left it a fortnight past with Oswald Cray, and Captain Davenal, who had come down to give her away, had remained since, with his wife, on a visit to Miss Davenal. He called her Aunt Bett still: but she was more cordial with him than she used to be, for she had learnt really to love the sweet young wife. She was in the habit of assuring him that Rose

was a greater treasure than he deserved; and in that he did not contradict her.

Two other visitors at the abbey were Dick and Leo. Poor Leo could not recover his health; Mrs. Keen grew timid about him, and it was decided that he should go back to his native place, Barbadoes, for a short while, and see what that would do. His father and mother felt persuaded it would effect wonders, and of course they thought nobody could take care of him as they could; so Leo was on the point of sailing. Mr. Dick, tolerated in the capacity of visitor as a necessary evil for his brother's sake, had come home to Sara's wedding, and was allowed to remain still, to see the last of Leo. Dick found the Michaelmas holidays delightful. What with getting inside the jam-closets, and making raids on sundry neighbouring gardens where the pears and apples grew too abundantly, and teasing Captain Davenal's son and heir — a noisy young gentleman, who promised to be another wicked Dick — and taking stealthy rides on the tops of the railway engines (lying out all tempting on the opposite side to the pears and apples) Mr. Dick found the time pass charmingly. Captain Davenal took him out shooting now and then, by way of a treat. One day that the captain was otherwise engaged, the gun disappeared, and Dick also; and Miss Bettina went all but into a real fit, expecting nothing less than to see him brought home with his head shot off. Dick, however, reappeared with his head on, and a pheasant and a partridge in his hand, which he had shot and brought home in open triumph, defying the game-laws. Miss Bettina wondered how long it would be before Dick came to the gallows.

There was one more visitor at the abbey. And that was Mark Cray. Mark, however, had been there but for a day or two, not for the wedding. He had come to bear off Leo Da-

venal: for the *compagnon de voyage* and protector of Leo to the West Indies, was to be no other than Mark.

Mark Cray was down in feather. Dreadfully so. After his wife's death Mark had made his way to Paris, to enter upon the brilliant career he supposed to be in readiness for him. Not *quite* ready, however, he found when he got there; some trifling preliminaries had to be completed yet. Mark thought nothing of the check: he was sanguine; Barker was sanguine; it was only a little delay; and Mark amused himself most agreeably, looking at the houses in the Champs Elysées, against the time came that he should require to fix upon one.

Mark's friends in England heard nothing of him until the middle of the summer; and then Mark himself appeared among them uncommonly crest-fallen. That something was wrong, appeared evident. Mark gave little explanation, but news was gathered from other sources. It appeared that Mr. Barker's grand project, with "finance" for its basis, had come to grief. At the very hour of its (expected) fruition, the thing had in some ingenious manner dropped through, and thereby entailed some temporary inconvenience, not to say embarrassment, on its two warm supporters, Barker and Mark. Of course it was entirely undeserved; a most cruel stroke of adverse, ill-natured fate; but nevertheless both of them had to bow to it. Mark Cray came over to England; and Barker was compelled to go into ignoble hiding, nobody but himself knew where, while he smoothed his ruffled plumes, and gathered his forces for a fresh campaign.

Reposing in quiet was all very well for Barker, who appeared to have some perpetual fund to draw upon somewhere: though, in point of fact, the man had not a penny in the world, and how he managed to get along in his tumbles down from luck, he alone could tell: but it was not well for Mark Cray,

Mark had not the grand genius of Barker — or whatever you may please to call it — the talent of extracting funds from some quarter or other for daily wants. If Mark was not “in luck,” Mark stood a chance of starving. When Mark went back to London, he had no home, no money, it may be said no friends; and, but for his meeting Captain Daneval one day accidentally, Mark could not, that he saw, have gone on at all. Later, some real luck did come to Mark. His late wife’s friends — who had never been made acquainted with the grand expectations of the great Paris scheme — wrote to tell Mark that through the unexpected death of one of the medical men in Barbadoes, an excellent practice might be secured by him if he chose to go out and step into it.

Be you very sure, Mark Cray did not hesitate. Hating the profession though he did, feeling an innate conviction within himself that he was ill-qualified for it, he yet decided to embrace it again as his calling and occupation in life. When it comes to starving with a man, there’s not much choice. So the decision was made, and Mark Cray was going out immediately to Barbadoes, and was to take charge of Leopold Davenal.

Once before you saw Miss Davenal waiting in that abbey for the return of a bridegroom and bride from their wedding-tour. She was so waiting in like manner now. Oswald Cray and his wife had stopped at Thorndyke for a day or two on their return, as they were now about to stop at Hallingham, on their way to their new home in London.

Not as the guests of Sir Philip Oswald. Sir Philip had gone to that place where visiting is not; and Sir Henry was the master of Thorndyke. He had wanted Oswald and Sara to stay the whole of their holiday there; but they had preferred a greater change.

Miss Davenal sat in her drawing-room. The October sun

was getting low, but still the expected guests had not arrived. Near to Miss Davenal, nursing a dancing baby that would not be coaxed to stillness, was a pretty, gentle woman, Mrs. Davenal. Leo stood at the window, looking out, and Mark Cray sat in a distant chair, restless, and pushing back his hair as usual. Mark did not altogether relish the expected presence of his half-brother; but there was no help for it. They had not met since Mark went off to Paris in the spring, largely telling Oswald that his debt to him would be paid with interest ere the year was out.

"Is not that a carriage, Leo?"

"No, Aunt Bettina, it's a baker's cart going by."

Miss Davenal caught enough of the reply to know that it was not what she asked after. "Where's Richard?" she presently said.

"I saw him over there on an engine just now," was Leo's answer, pointing towards the station.

"He'll be brought home on one some day, blown up. Rose, my dear, that baby is tiring you. Let Leo ring for the nurse."

Mrs. Davenal laughed, and was about to say that the baby did not tire her and she would rather keep him, when Dick burst in.

"It's coming down the road; it will be here in a minute. Look, Aunt Bett!"

He dashed across the room to the window as he spoke. Example is contagious, and they all followed him. One of the Thorndyke carriages was drawing up to the door. Excitable Dick quitted the window and flew down again.

They were soon in the room. Sara, with her sweet face at rest now, and Oswald behind her. A few moments given to greeting, and Sara had taken the baby, and Oswald was shaking hands with his brother.

"I had no idea we should find you here, Mark."

Mark answered, something which nobody could catch, and Captain Davenal came in.

"Is Henry Oswald with you?"

"No," said Oswald. "He will be in Hallingham to-morrow. He sadly wanted us to stay longer with him, Miss Bettina, and go on straight to London from Thorndyke. What would you have said to that?"

"Thank you," said Miss Davenal, hearing it was impossible to say what. "I shall be happy to see him."

"Have you seen your old friends, Mark?" asked Oswald; "have you been out much?"

"I have not been out at all, and I have seen none of them," responded Mark, gloomily. "I don't want to see them."

"How's Mr. Barker? Have you heard from him lately?"

"I heard the day before I came here," replied Mark, a shade of brightness rising to his countenance. "Barker has all the luck of it in this world. He is in something good again."

"Again!" repeated Oswald, suppressing his strong inclination to laugh.

"So he writes me word. It's something he has taken in hand and is going to perfect. If it comes to anything I shall return from Barbadoes and join him."

"Oh," said Oswald. "Well, Mark, I hope you will have a pleasant voyage out there, and that you will find your journey all you can wish."

Dinner would soon be ready, and Sara was shown to her room. It overlooked the Abbey graveyard. She took off her bonnet and stood there, lost in many reminiscences of the past, in the changes that time had wrought, in the uncertain contemplation of the future. What would be poor Mark Cray's future? Would he abide at Barbadoes, applying himself, as

well as his abilities allowed him, to the pursuit of his legitimate profession? — or would his unstable, weak mind be dazzled with these illegitimate and delusive speculations to the end, until they engulfed him?

How strangely, wonderfully had they been brought through changes and their accompanying trials! In this very room, where she now stood, Oswald had been born. The poor little boy, sent adrift as may be said without a home, motherless, as good as fatherless, had worked out his own way in the world, striving always to make a friend of God. Ah, when did it ever fail? It is the only sure help in life.

And what had her own later troubles been; her cares, anxieties, sorrows? Looking back, Sara saw great cause to reproach herself: why had she so given way to despair? It is true that she had never, in a certain sense, a degree, lost her trust in God: but she had not believed there could be this bright ending. A little ray of the setting sun was reflected on the tombstone formerly noticed; it fell on the significant inscription, "Buried in misery." Sara wondered whether he, the unhappy tenant, had never learned to abide in God.

So absorbed was she in thought that she did not notice any one had come into the room, until a hand was laid upon her shoulder. It was her husband's. He put some letters down in the broad, old-fashioned window-seat.

"They have been sent on to me here from the office," he explained, as Sara glanced at them. "Business letters, all. In one there's a bit of gossip, though: in Allister's."

"Is one of them from Allister?"

"Yes. Jane's going to be married. They have met with some Scotch gentleman out there, an old acquaintance of Jane's, and things are settled. Frank says his tongue is broad Scotch, and he can't understand half he says. Jane does, however, so it's all right."

A smile played upon Sara's lips, as she thought of the past jealousy. She might tell her husband of it some time. "Does Mr. Allister keep well?" she asked.

"He has been quite well ever since he went there: *he* says very strong. I hope it has set him up for life. What were you thinking of so deeply, Sara, that you did not hear me come in?"

"At the moment, I was thinking of that evening when you and I met there, in the graveyard," she answered, pointing down to it. "What a miserable evening it was!"

"Don't dwell on it, love. *I* cannot, without a pang of shame."

"Nay, but it is pleasant to look back upon it now, Oswald. It is pleasant to contrast that time with this."

He shook his head with a sort of shiver, and relapsed into silence, his hand thrown round her.

"Oswald," she resumed in a low tone, "*won't* you tell me what your suspicion was?"

"I will tell you some time, Sara; not now. Oh, my wife, my wife, how much is there in the past for many of us to repent of!" he continued in what seemed an uncontrollable impulse. "And it is only through God's mercy that we do repent."

She laid her head upon his shoulder and let it rest there. Its safe abiding-place, so long as the world, for them, should last.

Only through God's mercy! My friends, may it be shed on us all throughout our pilgrimage in this chequered life, and ever abide with us unto the end! Fare you well.



THE END.

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